RACE TRAITOR

Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity

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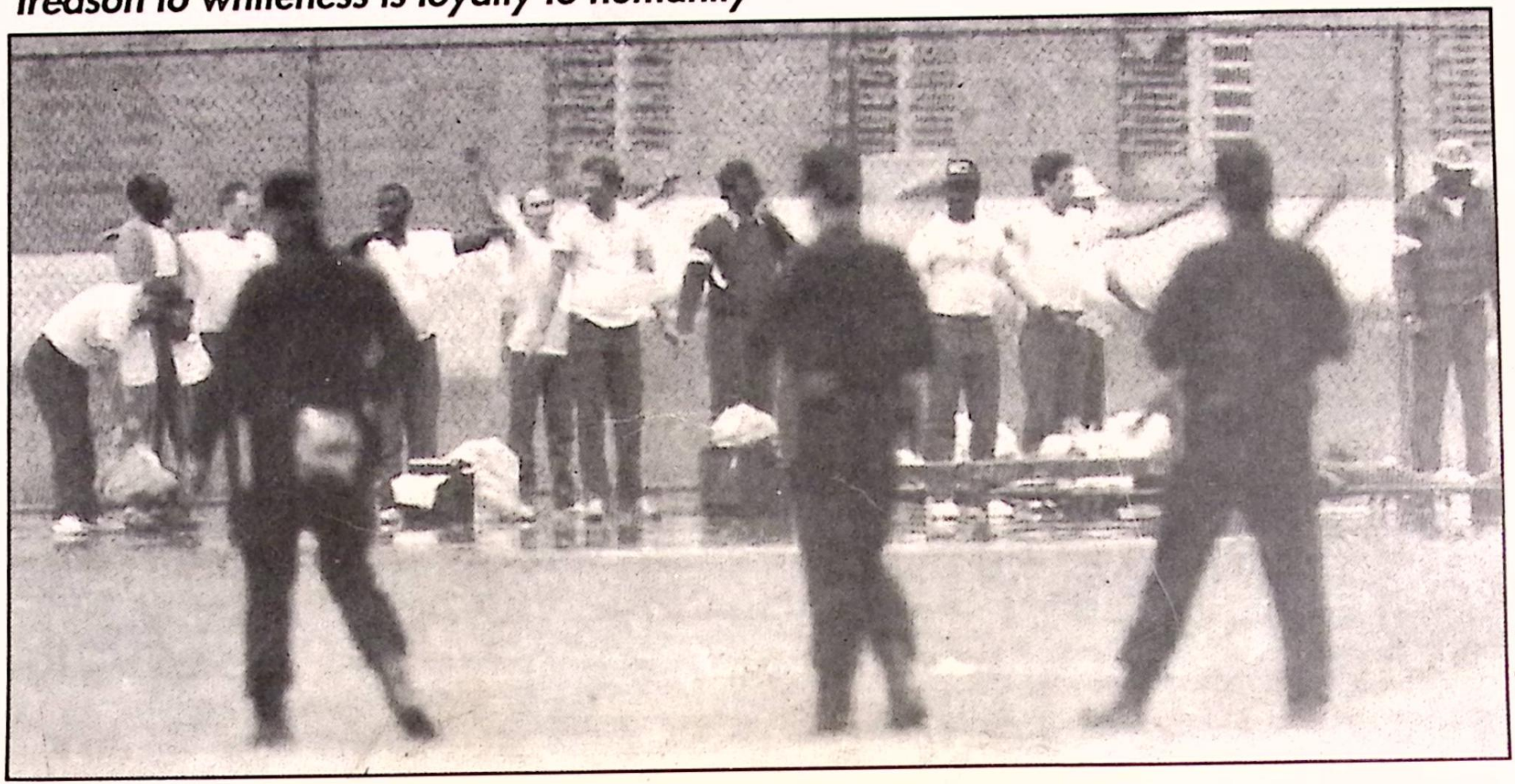

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Cover photo: Prisoners surrendering to guards at Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, April 1993.

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WHO LOST AN AMERICAN?

BY JOEL GILBERT, AS TOLD TO NOEL IGNATIEV

I was born in 1973, and grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, a town of thirty thousand people. The north end of town was pretty much for the wealthy or the upper class, and the south end, where I grew up, was mostly white, working- class people. There were some black folks, some Hispanic folks, but not many. I have one older brother, a younger sister, and a younger brother.

One of the first things I can remember is my father beating my mother. My father had a good job as a truck driver for the local dairy, and he was making pretty good money. He was trying to establish a middle- class life, and he just couldn't deal with the pressures, so he would take it out on my mother. We had a big family and we ate a lot. My mother went shopping and spent a lot on groceries. My father was upset at her because she bought this four- dollar box of cereal. It was sugar-coated and he had this thing about sugar. She came home, and he saw this box of cereal, and took the box of cereal and smashed it and threw it down the stairs, and then beat my mother, screaming that we couldn't afford it, and that us kids shouldn't have that kind of cereal. The next morning when we woke up, we saw him sitting at the table. He had gone to the basement and got out the cereal box and was eating the cereal. Seeing that just twisted my insides. It made me hurt so much.

I can always remember seeing my older brother getting beaten. Once my father told him to take out the garbage. My brother was maybe seven or eight at the time. While he was trying to drag the big garbage bags, my dad yelled at him to bring him his wallet. My brother did that, but he got distracted and forgot to take out the garbage. When my father saw that, he picked my brother up by the neck, and dragged him down a flight of stairs, and stuck his face in the garbage, and started screaming at him. Then he threw him up a flight of stairs and started kicking him into the bedroom. He took out his leather belt and beat him. That stuck in my head for a long time.

From the moment I was born I knew my father hated me, but I knew my mother loved me. I recall an incident, from when I was about five. My father was burning the trash in the back yard and I had this little twig-- you know how little kids are fascinated by fire-- well, I was trying to get this twig to catch fire, and he kept screaming at me, "Get away

from the fire," and I wouldn't get away. There was a plastic Crisco bottle in the fire, and it blew up, and spattered hot oil on my hands and face. I was scared and thought I was going to die, and he told me to shut up, and took me up and put cold water on my hands and face. My mother wanted to take me to the hospital, and he said no, it was my own fault, and he couldn't afford another hospital bill. For five hours they were putting ice on me and finally my mom wrapped me in a blanket and sneaked me out of the house and took me to the hospital. They said if I hadn't got there I would have been scarred permanently.

When I was in first grade, my mom got a divorce and we moved to a different house. My father would come around and bug her and demand that they get married again. I remember coming into the room from my bedroom and he was standing above her and she was sitting there with tears running down her face. He had a monstrous grimace, and she told me to go back to bed. One night he came to the house when my mother was listening to the stereo, and she wouldn't let him in. He forced his way in and threw the stereo out the window. I heard all this, but I was too scared to get out of bed.

My mom got a court order to keep him away, and the police would come and sympathize with my father. Those policemen weren't out to protect us. The courts wouldn't do anything. He owed my mother a lot of money that we could have used to eat.

My mom knew she had to get away and we moved to Ann Arbor, two hours from Port Huron. There was no way he could drive down there the way he used to. We would visit him every other week, and he would buy us clothes and toys, but he wouldn't let us take them home when we left.

While we lived in Ann Arbor, my mom had two different jobs. She worked at an insurance company and also at a bar. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment, not much space or privacy, not too much to eat. We had good times, though. Our family got really close, and my older brother and I looked after each other, and after our younger brother and sister. We didn't have a television so we went garbage- picking and found one. When we wanted snacks we would scrounge up change in the house and buy candy. We entertained each other, and would go for walks together. I learned to cook and scrub pots and pans when I was eight years old. My mom was always good to us when she could be. But she started drinking and developed a problem with alcohol. We lived with her in Ann Arbor for about two years, and then she couldn't afford to keep us any more. At that time my father owed my mother about five thousand dollars in child support, and she essentially traded us to him. They worked it out with the court so that she wouldn't have to pay any child support but

would get us back after two years. A lot of this I found out later.

So we moved back from our mother to our father, and that's when things got really bad. When we moved in with him, he was working a lot too, so the system we had set up when we lived with our mother continued. My brothers, sister, and I were all very close. We had to watch over each other. We cooked, we cleaned, we entertained each other. I looked up to my brother more than I did my father. I had little respect for my father. He had never been able to control us when we were all together and we thought he had no right to now. So he beat us. Most of it was directed against my older brother and me, because we knew what was going on and hated him. My younger brother and sister were too young to understand and he left them alone.

He'd beat me every day, for anything from not cleaning a dish properly to not getting a grade in school. After the physical beating was over, the emotional abuse would start. He would tell me that he loved me and that I was a bad kid, and that he didn't want to do what he had to do, but he did it because he loved me. So I was very confused about myself, and what this man represented to me. I didn't understand who gave him the authority to treat me the way he did. And that whole time he was taking us to church each week. He was a devout Christian. To this day he seems like the nicest person you could meet, in public. But behind closed doors, he's a monster.

I had always been rebellious in school. When I moved in with my father that rebellion continued. I was in a new school, and I didn't like the situation I was living in, and so I was a troublemaker. I was an outcast because I was a little on the weird side. Essentially I went on my own, and did my own things and stayed to myself. My brother had a paper route and I would help him with that. I would hang with some of the older people on the route, and talk to them.

The friends I had were all into playing war games. We'd go and get plastic guns and play in the woods, and talk about military strategies. I started getting interested in World War II. I read a lot about it. Reading was an escape for me. I think it was history that drew me to reading, because I loved to go into another time. I started reading about Nazis, and the more I got into that the less I focused on the other parts of the War. I got interested in the different things Hitler was doing. The more I read about Hitler the more powerful he seemed to me. I could relate to that power. I felt helpless, like I had no power, and I felt that through his message I could get power.

I knew that Germany and the U.S. had fought on opposite sides in the War, but that didn't matter. I didn't like the American way of life. I was unhappy with what I saw. At that age I had realized that my father

was working a lot. He would come home from the day's work and wanted to see things clean. And if they weren't clean he would take it out on us. I didn't understand why my father had to work so much, and why whatever happened at work made him angry enough to come home and hit me and my older brother. Also I didn't like being pushed around and humiliated by my teachers because I was different. I had trouble learning and they called me dumb. I realized that school wasn't going to do anything for me, my father and mother weren't going to do anything for me, the community I lived in wasn't going to do anything. So I looked to other places. I would watch TV documentaries on Hitler and they would talk about how he built the autobahns, and how he and Dr. Porsche produced the Volkswagen bug, which really fascinated me because I liked that type of car. They were able to put everybody to work, and give everybody a car, and build themselves up to the point where eventually they could take on the whole world in a war. I studied about how they went into Russia, and how they were able to roll in there until the cold and the Russian fighters fought them back. It seemed like they had so much power. Like at the Nuremberg rallies, where it seemed that they had hundreds of thousands of people doing the same thing-- their right hands to Hitler, and he was able to command them to do anything he wanted. I would daydream about that being me, here in America, about being Hitler or somebody of his strength and power.

I realized through my studies that he had killed six million Jews. But at that point I was starting to get connected with the grandfather of one of my friends. He lived alone a few blocks away from my house, and I'd go over and talk with him. He was an anti- semite. He had a whole room full of books and magazines of different white- supremacist and anti-semitic groups. Even though he didn't claim to be a nazi-- he actually disliked the nazis-- he liked to read up on what they were doing. He talked about the Establishment, by which he meant international Jewry controlling the world through capital. He said that there weren't six million Jews killed. He gave me a pamphlet that said there was no Auschwitz, that during the War it was a factory that produced clothes for soldiers, and that towards the end of the War Hollywood flew into Germany and turned this wrecked factory into a filmset with gas chambers to make it look like six million Jews were killed. I was thirteen or fourteen and I didn't know what to believe. This guy said that the Jews controlled Hollywood and had faked the whole thing. He sculpted a lot of my ideas to what the Nazi Party believed, that the capitalist system was created by the Jews and that they were doing that to get rich. He started giving me books about the Rockefellers, and he traced how DuPont was all Jews, and I went along with it because I wanted some-

thing to believe in.

I knew one kid from a Jewish family. We were living in Ann Arbor, and he was one of my friends, and I would go over to his house-- this was maybe in the third grade-- and he was an only child and lived in this huge house. His mother and father were gone all the time and he had a maid, and video games, and big models of dinosaurs. I loved dinosaurs and I asked him where did he get all this stuff, and he said his parents just bought it for him. I couldn't believe it. One of his toys amounted to all my toys and I was amazed at all the shit he had. When Christmas time came he celebrated Hanukkah, and I would go over his house and for every day of Hanukkah he would get a box of toys, and all I would get for Christmas would be a few toys, and I only had one of these days and he had seven of them. That was in the back of my head when I began hearing all the anti- semitic shit.

I don't think I hated black folks. One of the people on my paper route was black. The family was so nice to me, and I would give them free papers because they didn't have much money, and they would give me coffee or cookies. They were in the same economic situation my family was in and I would hang out with the son. I didn't hate black people but that kind of fit into the whole Nazi idea. I was supposed to hate them.

This period of my life developed over two years of living with my father and being beat around by him, and the school, and just fed up. I thought this was a way out. I had only one other friend who was into Nazism. He was a kid in high school in the ninth grade, and he was from a worse situation than mine. He would come to school dirty, with his hair messed up-- so did I, but not like this kid. He had only one pair of pants. His father beat him openly, black and blue marks. My father was always smart enough not to leave any marks. This kid and I started talking. He liked to use the word n- i- g- g- e- r more often than I did, and he hated Jews, even though he didn't know any Jews either, and he said that his uncle was a white supremacist. He was a lot like me: he hated his folks, he hated school, he hated the town we had to grow up in.

I watched Oprah Winfrey on TV and there were skinheads on her show and I was cheering them on. In the back of my mind I realized that they were fools, but I wanted to get in touch with them. I didn't have any names or addresses of people to contact, but if I did I would have. At that point in my life I could have become a full- fledged Nazi. I was ready for it. If there had been some group around I could have joined, I would have.

What turned me around? At the time I was getting interested not only in the Nazis but in other things, like the Weathermen and the

Chicago 7. People were telling me about SDS[1], because I grew up in Port Huron and people knew that the founding statement of SDS was adopted there, in the park my family used to go to in the summer for picnics. I knew I was radical, that I disliked the system, that I disliked my parents and the school system. I got interested in Charles Manson, because I knew he was radical, and killed people, and wanted to tear down the system. I was looking for alternatives to the Nazis, because there was something inside me that told me it was wrong. A lot of that was my Christian beliefs, that asked me why would I hate black people? I mean, my next- door neighbor was black, and he was a good guy. And then I didn't know any Jews, so why would I hate them? Even if the world was run by Jews, what did that have to do with me?

I bought *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver, and read that, and I was starting to get into the Black Power movement, and my mom asked me if I had ever read Malcolm X. And she asked, why didn't I get a copy of that? And so I saved up some money and bought a copy. This was before the whole Malcolm X craze, and I sat down and read it. I read about the white supremacists who burned down his house, and killed his father, and tore apart his family, and I thought, if these folks could do that just because of his skin color, then that couldn't be the answer at all, no way. The more I read about Malcolm X and his life, the more I identified with him. I felt so bad that whites had treated him the way they did, but at the same time I knew that whites were treating me the same way. The funny thing is, at that time I didn't finish the book. Since then I've read the whole thing, but at that time I had the habit of starting books and not finishing them, and I didn't get past the part where he returns from Mecca.

From there I considered myself a black nationalist. I started looking for people who were like Malcolm X. Maybe I could hook up with them, and find a way to escape from the oppression I felt. I hated whites. I would talk about the god damn honkies, or whatever. I hated the little town I grew up in, and I thought that when I grew up I would move to Detroit or Chicago and join up with some people and come back and wipe the place out.

I was always in trouble, and my father didn't know how to handle it. When we were still living in Ann Arbor, my mom wanted to help us deal with everything that was happening, so she started taking us to family

1. Students for a Democratic Society was a radical student organization in the 1960s. The Weatherman (later the Weather Underground Organization) came out of SDS, and attempted to act in solidarity with the Black liberation movement and the Vietnamese struggle against US imperialism. The Chicago 7 were seven prominent 60s activists indicted for conspiracy for their work organizing demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic Party national convention..

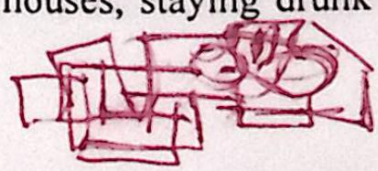
therapy. When I moved in with my father he took me to the school therapist and then he took me to psychologists. I would tell them what was happening. And then they would organize family sessions, and I would sit in the room, with the therapist in the middle and my father on the other side, and they would make me repeat what I had told them in private. And I would do it, and my father would just shake his head, and they would believe him and not me. And so I was this rebellious kid who was making up lies. And after the sessions he would scream at me for saying things that were not true. He was in his own denial. I knew I didn't want to be a man like my father. He wasn't a man, he was a coward. I later found out that his father did the same thing to him, and who knows what his father did to him. This is the kind of thing that goes on and society just doesn't see it. And the thing is, I had several different friends in school who had the same problems. I knew one kid who killed himself because his father beat him.

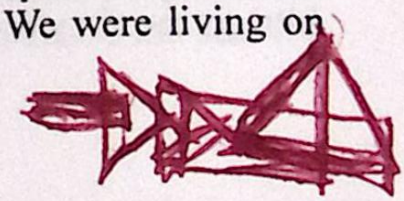
I moved back with my mother when I was about sixteen. I switched schools and had to make new friends. I was a complete outcast because I was different. I tried to fit in but I couldn't. People would make fun of me and I was depressed all the time. I stopped going to school. I began seeing a new therapist. Finally I put myself into the hospital. I told the therapist that I needed a place where I could be safe. So she worked it out so that I could go to a mental hospital in Detroit.

I was there for three weeks and that screwed me up worse than before, because they put me on all kinds of medications-- the first one was prozac, then they put me on lithium, then on haldol, and another drug. The drugs gave me neck spasms, and I couldn't swallow, and I could hardly breathe. Just recently have I learned that these drugs have killed people. They were about to send me to a bigger institution where I would have been for at least a year, where I would have been doped up more on their shit. I cleaned up my act and played straight for a couple of days, and then I went to my psychiatrist and said I was ready to go home. I promised to continue taking my drugs, and he let me go home. I went back home and kept getting more depressed.

I was suicidal from age twelve on. My older brother actually attempted suicide when he was seventeen. And then he went into the army and that really fucked him up. So there were all kinds of things that could have happened to me. I could have killed myself, I could have become a Nazi, I could have been in a mental institution for the rest of my life.

I dropped out of school and was working at different jobs which didn't last. I was still living with my mom, but I would spend a lot of time at friends's houses, staying drunk and getting high. We were living on





the north side at that time, where a lot of the rich kids lived, and I would see them driving Mercedes, and wearing expensive clothes, and that didn't make any sense to me, because I had only three or four outfits and got most of my clothes from the Goodwill. Finally, when I was just turning seventeen I decided I couldn't go on like this anymore, and that I was going to understand why my life is so fucked up, and do what I needed to do to destroy the church, to destroy the family, to destroy the cops, the courts, the schools, and to destroy psychiatry. I turned vegetarian, because I realized that the meat I was eating represented so much of the system. People beat their wives, beat their children, and kill animals and eat them. When the Gulf War was building up, I marched together with some people from the local community college, on a peaceful march from the town hall to the local recruiting station. Looking back, I wish I had stormed a cop the way I wanted to. At the same time I was scared, because I knew that seventeen- year- olds could be drafted, and I didn't want to go to the army or have anything to do with that war.

I was looking through the Detroit News and I saw ads from a peace group for people to canvas against the Gulf War. I called the office and told them I was good at knocking on doors and talking to people, because of my paper route, and that I wanted to move to Ann Arbor. They told me to come down for an interview, and so I packed up my bags, told my mom I wasn't going to live off her any more. I said goodbye to my family and moved to Ann Arbor, with twenty- five dollars in my pocket. I didn't say goodbye to my father because I didn't want to have anything to do with him. That was on January 18, 1991, two days after the Gulf War started-- a cold Michigan winter, and I gave five bucks to a friend to drive me there.

I had a place to live, with five guys who were friends of a friend, students at the University of Michigan. The first day I got there I found a girlfriend. She was going with this guy who lived there, and I was only seventeen, and we hit it off and began hanging around together. The second day I got a job, and the third day I found an apartment. It was a shared apartment and didn't last long, because I couldn't pay the rent, but I moved in with a friend after that.

Working with the anti- war movement was an incredible time in my life, because I learned a lot about the lies the government told. I started canvassing door- to- door. We were talking about how since the cold war was over the government should take money out of war and put it into a peacetime economy. I was reaching a lot of people, but I also met some who were pretty negative. I remember one time when I was canvassing a subdivision near Detroit. It was a cold, snowy night-- I almost had frostbite on my fingers-- and this guy got out of his car and left his lights on

and came up to me. He was about a foot taller than me, and he got right in my face and asked me if I was the one who was going around talking against the War. When I said I was he told me that his mother was at home crying, because his brother was over there and what I said scared her. I told him I didn't mean to scare her, that I was just trying to spread the truth. Well we talked and I don't think I convinced him, but he calmed down. I went to the demonstration in Washington and that was big- time for me, because I got to see this movement happening. I had a good time in Ann Arbor, going to demonstrations-- nothing too radical, because I was kind of scared, and I didn't have money for bail, so I just did your normal protesting.

When the War ended I didn't have anything more to rant about, so I got in touch with the local drug scene, and with some local Deadheads, and began hanging out with them. I began to travel, and towards the end of the summer I came to Boston, and my friend from Ann Arbor was living there, and he introduced me to my now- girlfriend. I went back to Michigan, but she and I stayed in touch, and I decided to move to Boston. I moved with four goals: the first was to have a relationship with my girlfriend; the second was to get a job; the third was to find a place to live; and the fourth was to go to college.

It was winter. I don't know why I choose winters to move. I slept on the street in Harvard Square. There was a strong group of kids who would go garbage- picking together, and chip in for food, and take care of each other. Even while I was homeless I had a job, but I would go in to work tired every day. It was a tough time, and I asked my mother to send me money for a train ticket home. She sent it to me, but just as I was about to go back I found an apartment, and so I gave the ticket money to the people I moved in with. And then I found another job, temp- ing for good money, and I found a better place to live, and my relationship with my girlfriend got better.

I still wanted to go to college. I enrolled in Roxbury Community College, expecting to find the black radicals I was looking for, so we could work together and smash the system. I am one of a handful of "white" students at Roxbury. I enrolled in some really good classes, but unfortunately I didn't find the people I wanted to hook up with. It wasn't as radical as I was hoping. In fact, there are hardly any radicals.

I went in with the idea that no matter what happened, I was going to educate myself, and I was going to make friends. I think I've done both of those things. At first I was a little scared. I didn't know how people would take to me, but I went in with a respectful attitude. I never tried to act in any special way, but just to be myself. After a while, people could see that, and started to return the respect. This year I'm on the student

government association, and I know a lot of the students and faculty. I spend a lot of time and energy integrating myself into the community. There are people there from all different parts of the Caribbean, from central and south America, from all parts of Africa, and those are people you can learn from. I don't think I represent the normal whites they see. Most of the kids there come from economic backgrounds similar to mine, and we have a lot in common. Never has anyone told me to get out because I didn't belong, or anything like that. People take their time and try to get to know me before they judge me.

I've lived in a lot of different parts of Boston. I lived in Somerville for a while, which is pretty white, and I noticed a lot of racist tendencies from people there, and I didn't like living there at all. I lived for a while in Dorchester, with two roommates. One was from Zimbabwe, the other was from here. He had both black and white family, and had to deal with the white part of his family. I learned a lot from that. I lived for six months on the line between Roxbury and the South End. It's a very poor area, a lot of drugs, with a lot of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic people. I took the same approach there that I took at RCC. I'd sit on the stoop and smoke with the guys, and shoot the shit. I found we liked the same type of music, and had a lot in common. It got a little too rough for my girlfriend and me, so we moved. I live with my girlfriend now in Jamaica Plain, in a very mixed area-- a lot of blacks, a lot of Hispanics, and the whites who live there tend to be cool. It's as much of a community as I've experienced in Boston. Other parts of J.P. have been gentrified, but I'm not part of that. I don't represent whiteness any more, and so there's no way I can gentrify anything. For the most part I feel at home with black people. I've got plenty of black inside me. And I think most of the whiteness I grew up with has washed away.

One of the reasons my girlfriend and I were able to come together is that she saw I'm not like the average white male. I don't want to boast on myself, but I think I'm more mature, because of my experiences, than the average person my age. She is a few years older than I am, but that is just like color-- it doesn't mean anything. She isn't as political as I am, but we share a way of looking at the world. I hope that as I evolve politically we can grow together.

I heard about *Race Traitor* from a friend. He is writing a dissertation on how the fundamentalist right attacks gay people. I was over his house and he was showing me some of their literature. Then he showed me a copy of *Race Traitor*, the first issue with a picture on the cover of some white kids pushing over a school bus. I looked at it, and I asked, "What is this, more right- wing garbage?" And I started reading it, and I said, "This is insane." And he said, "No that is sanity." I started to read it and

I couldn't make any sense out of it. He told me to take it home and read it and make sense out of. And so I took it home, and read the editorial about abolishing the white race, and when I was finished I said, "This is me. I'm a race traitor." That editorial explained a lot of what I already believed.

I read that issue three or four times. I didn't know what I could do, but I wanted to get involved in the publication. So I wrote to the address in the magazine, and gave my phone number, and that's how the connection started. Since then I've read both issues, and I've given it to other people I know.

I'm interested in history. Right now I'm reading a book on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. That blows my mind, how people came together and started a revolution, and were able to develop workers' councils that were so powerful that the government was nothing compared to them. They had found something that doesn't come up too often. They had learned how to organize themselves instead of having somebody else organize them. If it hadn't been for Khrushchev sending in the Russian Army and massacring thousands of people, the workers' councils would have carried Hungary out of the mess it was in. I'm also reading stuff by C.L.R. James, who I knew of before because of my class at RCC on the Caribbean. I'm getting into reading Marx and Engels, trying to understand their point of view. I read a lot of things about them before, but now I want to hear it from the horse's mouth. It's tough to read. Because I'm interested in revolutionary ideas, I'd like to form a collective with other folks who have ideas similar to mine, so we can study together, organize together, and tear some shit up.

In another year I'll have my associate degree from RCC. From there I'd like to go to U.Mass for my B.A. Eventually I'd like to go on and do a doctorate. The pieces of paper don't mean that much to me, but they are things I can use to take care of myself, and besides, I'd like to have the knowledge.

I'd like to get involved in community organizing. I've got ideas for a small publication, to share the knowledge I've acquired with kids my age who haven't had the opportunity to study. And I'd like to establish contact with other people around the country who feel the same way I do. *Race Traitor* has already helped me do that. I want to learn more about what the Nazi organizations are like in Boston, and around the country, and even in the world. They are getting organized too, and I'd like to do some damage to them. I can understand where a lot of the young Nazis are coming from, because I was at the same place. I would also like to confront them directly.

I like to watch movies for entertainment. Thee are a lot of movies

out there that address some of my political beliefs. I just recently saw "Blue Collar." It takes a look at three workers at an automobile plant in Detroit. I think it does a good job at showing how plant management and the unions fuck with people's lives. Music is very important to me. I grew up listening to all kinds of music. Some of my favorite bands were The Dead Kennedy's and Crass. I still listen to a lot of the same music, but I tend to listen to more hard core rap now. One of my favorite rap groups is The Goats. They're very political and share a lot of my views. Sometimes I watch MTV, and I can see how they try to socialize kids, by taking subversive bands and commercializing their music.

I want to destroy this so- called white society. I don't want any more kids to grow up like I did. I don't want to see psychiatry being used to hurt people. I don't want to see cops beating down anybody, black or white. I don't want to see families destroyed the way mine was. The kid this society gave birth to and tried to socialize has rebelled.

Back from Hell: Black Power and Treason to Whiteness Inside Prison Walls

BY LORENZO KOMBOA ERVIN

The federal penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana had the reputation of being the most racist and brutal prison in the federal prison system. The city of Terre Haute itself had been known in the 1920s as one of the strongest base areas of the Ku Klux Klan in the Midwest. As I was to discover later, many prison guards were Klan members or sympathizers. There were no black guards at the time I entered it, in the summer of 1970.

The most famous inmate to do time at the prison was the 1950s rock and roll singer, Chuck Berry, during the early 1960s, and reportedly he spoke disparagingly about the state of Indiana for years afterward and said he would never have a concert in the city of Terre Haute. I do not know if this was true.

Usually racism is the best tool of the prison officials to control volatile prison populations. The warden and his guards intentionally keep up racial hostilities through rumors and provocation, and give a free hand within the prison to groups like the KKK and the Aryan Brotherhood to maim or kill black prisoners. They use the racist white

The writer was born and raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is a former member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party. He spent fifteen years in prison for hijacking a plane to flee charges of planning to kill a local Klan member. He is the author of Anarchism and the Black Revolution. *This article is adapted from his forthcoming book* Years of Struggle, Years of Death: the Lorenzo Ervin Story, *to be published by AK Press and Autonomedia. The editors believe it will take its place in autobiographical literature alongside the chapter in Frederick Douglass's* Narrative *where Douglass describes his fight with the slavebreaker. Ervin, along with seven other activists, is currently under indictment for his participation in a demonstration in Chattanooga on May 13, 1993 protesting the failure of a grand jury to bring charges against police who choked black motorist Larry Powell to death. The demonstration took place at the unveiling of a memorial to Chattanooga police.*

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prisoners to confine both themselves and others, in return for special privileges and the fleeting feeling that they are "helping" the "white race" maintain control. This is how the system imprisons whites and uses them in their own oppression. The officials can usually count on recruiting a steady supply of racist murderers and henchmen from the white prison population. But an important part of the plan is to beat down or silence anti- racist whites, in order to make sure all whites toe the fascist line. In fact, without this conformity the whole plan would not work.

For years many black inmates had been beaten or killed at Terre Haute by both white prison inmates and guards. I knew from the stories I had been told by black prisoners in Atlanta that this was true. In fact, the black prisoners at Terre Haute had lived in total fear of the whites. I say "had" because by the time I got there things had started to change.

A group of young militant black prisoners had formed an organization called the Afro-American Cultural Studies Program (AACSP), which met each week and discussed black history and culture, as well as world current events. The prison officials hated the group but had to grant their charter because of a lawsuit filed against the Warden and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. But the Warden, John Tucker, said that if they started "acting militant," he would grant a Klan charter for the racist white inmates--as if they secretly already didn't have one! Warden Tucker had a well-earned reputation for brutality against black inmates. The older blacks told us "young bloods" all kinds of horror stories about Tucker, and about the blacks killed or mutilated over the years by white guards and inmates. Black men were hanged, stabbed, thrown into a threshing machine, beaten with pipes, burned alive in their cells, and murdered in every other way imaginable. Tucker even had a group of white inmates who acted as his "hit men" against whites who refused to conform to the racist line. But the "young bloods," and especially the black inmates from AACSP, would not be intimidated and vowed that they would fight back to the death. Shortly after I arrived in the prison, I threw in my lot with them.

At one of their meetings held each Thursday, I asked what I had to do to join. The gentleman who had been acting as the moderator, a short, dark, bald-headed brother from Detroit, whose name was Nondu, told me all that was necessary was to actively take a part. I was introduced to all the brothers there--fifty in all--but especially to Karenga, a huge, but affable, brother from Cincinnati, along with his prison rap partner, a relatively smallish brother named Desumba, and then Hassan and Nondu from Detroit, all of whom were the principal AACSP officers.

They, along with the general members, all welcomed me into the group and treated me like family. Karenga, the President of the group, actually became my best friend, and saved my life on more than one occasion.

These brothers all wore shaved heads, and were influenced ny the 1960s cultural nationalist figure, Ron Karenga, along with the Cleveland, Ohio black nationalist Ahmed Evans (who, with his second in command, Nondu Lathan, was serving life in Ohio state prison for killing several policemen in 1968), but their greatest influence was Malcolm X. I was not greatly enamored of Ron Karenga, who headed a Los Angeles-based group called "US" (United Slaves), which was implicated in the murder of two Black Panther Party members in 1969, and purportedly engaged in other internecine violence against the BPP. The Panthers believed that Karenga was a police agent, or knowingly allowed the crimes to take place because of some political sectarian reason. But my initial doubts did not stop me from taking part in the AACSP. It became my all-consuming passion while at the prison, and I would fight and die to defend it. In fact, I almost did make the supreme sacrifice.

We had to fight both the racist authorities and the white inmates on behalf of the black prison population, many of whom were intimidated into silence. We were bold and audacious, and carried on a virtual guerrilla war to strike back at the killers of black men, whether they were guards or inmates. The whites hated and feared us because we were ruthless in defending ourselves and punishing racists. There was no mercy. Our retaliation was always swift and bloody.

Our kind of revolutionary blacks had never been seen before at Terre Haute, and it changed the status quo when we fought back. Many of the prisoners were white radicals who were in prison for anti-war cases, and they in turn began to educate other whites. This anti-racist organizing by white radicals was important because it ensured that white prisoners would no longer be indoctrinated or intimidated by the Klan as they had been for the previous thirty-five years at that prison. This re-education was something black revolutionaries could not effectively do alone, and it created a new sense of unity among the prisoners as a class. The white prisoners began to check out books from the Black Culture library, to attend joint political study groups, and to try to understand in theoretical terms how racism was a way of enslaving us all--blacks and other non-whites as inferiors, whites as oppressors. They understood now how the Klan had been doing the bidding of the prison officials for years, just like the white workers in society do the bidding of the capitalists. Fascist politics became not only unpopular but *unsafe*.

Guards used to the old regime decided to suddenly "retire," and racist inmates begged to be transferred. The Warden and his staff were greatly alarmed, but powerless to take any action lest they precipitate a full-fledged race riot, which would also get guards and staff killed in large numbers. The prison officials realized they were losing control, and began to panic. All prison officials know that if racism is surmounted, revolt is inevitable.

Then in September of 1971 the Attica prison revolt erupted in upstate New York, and riveted the attention of the entire world on the U.S. prison system. Revolutionary prisoners--black, Latin, and white--had taken guards hostage at Attica and were running the prison. This terrified prison officials all over the United States. It also pushed forward the prison struggle and made it a red-hot issue.

Even after the repression of Attica, sympathy rebellions broke out all over the country, including at Terre Haute, where for the first time black, white, and Hispanic prisoners rose up to fight the prison officials. Buildings were torched or bombed, people tried to escape, strikes and industrial sabotage went on, and desperate hand-to-hand combat between guards and prisoners in the high-security L-unit was taking place, along with other acts of resistance which seemed to break out daily.

Warden Tucker and his staff panicked, and rushed to start building a new wing of high-security cells in L-unit to hold the "malcontents" in his prison. He then tried to provoke a confrontation, a "race riot" among inmates, but this didn't work because we had chased away most of the racists, and had made alliances with progressive white and Latino prisoners. These prisoners, many of whom were schooled in revolutionary politics, wouldn't fall for the old tricks.

The Warden could not convince the white prisoners, who had now struggled and suffered next to us, to accept the old racist "hate bait." They knew they were prisoners, and would not accept white skin privileges or resurrect the Klan to help the Warden run the prison. These white prisoners were standing up against their masters, and *they were a different people entirely*. They no longer saw anything in common with the Warden, not even "whiteness." The black prison population had overcome its fear and insecurity to become the vanguard and the backbone of a serious threat to the organized racial violence and repression which had ruled unchallenged for years.

Frustrated, Tucker then just told his officers to begin rounding up the AACSP leaders and throw them into the new security unit. But we had prepared for this eventuality, and had decided not to go down without a fight. So the first time they came for our leaders, it precipitated a

twelve-hour standoff when we took over one of the prison units where most of them were, booby-trapped the doors with explosives and other traps, and held the unit guards hostage. The prisoners armed themselves with spears, knives, home-made dynamite, and other weapons.

Realizing how serious the situation had become, a truce was negotiated by Tucker for protection of our so-called constitutional rights to have disciplinary hearings for the leadership instead of just summarily throwing them into solitary, and for no reprisals over the protest. But this agreement for amnesty and standard disciplinary hearings with outside legal representation was swiftly broken as soon as the authorities re-took control of the institution. All of the known leaders of the AACSP, and their white and Latin allies, were snatched up and rammed into high-security cells.

The officials were thus satisfied that they had removed the threat, and that the absence of the first level of leadership would cause the group to collapse. But on the contrary, the organization never missed a beat. We had set up AACSP as an organization which had several levels of leadership; there was no primary leader. So as soon as the original founding leaders were removed, the secondary leadership took over. I took over as President, and the other slots were quickly filled by a new wave of leaders. We kept up the struggle, continued our weekly meetings, and began sending out a monthly newsletter to tell our outside supporters and the press what was going on.

We had always had a number of programs to help prisoners: a library of radical and black books, political education classes, literacy classes and job training, and we kept these going. We even demanded that officials allow us to take books and materials to those leaders in the solitary confinement units. The officials had to agree, since they saw they had failed to destroy us in the previous incident.

Finally, after several months of this standoff, officials created another provocation by attacking one of the leaders in solitary, Brother Hassan. He was badly beaten when he objected to a guard spitting and blowing his nose into the prisoners' food. We knew this was a set-up, so we did not violently respond. We demanded that the harassment cease, circulated a petition, and filed a lawsuit in the local court system. Even though we did not attack the guards like they wanted, they began to round us up anyway, claiming that we were "planning" to create a disturbance. The truth was the officials concocted this "conspiracy" to try to destroy the organization and justify these harsh security measures.

We were all thrown into the special security cells in L-unit and were only let out for showers and the law library. For twenty-three hours a day we were locked down in these cells, which were about the size of

your bathroom. The guards taunted us by calling us racist and offensive names, and spitting and blowing their noses in our food. They would do this right in front of you hoping you would object so they would have an excuse to call you a "smartass nigger" and beat up on you. They would gang up and beat prisoners bloody, especially those they did not like.

After a discussion among the comrades in the unit, we decided to rebel against these conditions before things got worse and somebody got killed. As it was, Hassan was so badly beaten he required stitches and a back brace.

One day when they opened the doors to take me to the law library, I knocked the handcuffs away, leaped out of the cell, hit one of the guards in the face with my fist and stabbed the other one in the hip with a knife. I tried to force them to open the security door to let all the prisoners out, but the guard who had the keys ran and threw them out the window into a hallway. So I was trapped along with them, and decided, in frustration, to kill our keepers who had been tormenting us for weeks.

I jumped on the guard I had punched, and stabbed him several times until the knife broke in his side. He screamed, "Don't kill me! Don't kill me! I've got a wife and three kids." I hit him again and again until he fell to the ground. Then I picked up a mop wringer to crush his skull, but the other guard attacked me from behind. I turned to hit him in the chest, and then we started to wrestle. Meanwhile the pig on the floor jumped up and sprayed my face with chemical MACE. I also had cut my forehead on the mop wringer, and blood flowed into my eyes, blinding me. I fought on in a blind rage!

By this time the other guards in the hallway had been alerted and ran into the unit with riot equipment. They started to beat me, but the other prisoners in the unit broke their cell windows out and started throwing coffee mugs, glass jars, and other things at the riot squad as they dragged me out of the unit, feet first, like I was some lifeless animal. But they were more afraid than I was, to see this stuff flying in the air at them, so they refrained from hitting me any more in front of the inmates.

I was dragged down the hallway by about six guards to the hospital, where I was thrown into a "mental observation" cell on the second floor. They were treating me as if I had gone "crazy." They ripped all of my clothes off of me, and then threw me naked into the cell.

There was no bed, linen, toilet, or even a sink to wash my face--just a door, a window, a hole in the wall to "do your business," and padding all over the floor and walls to either cushion these "crazy" inmates from injuring themselves when they run their heads into the walls, or to cushion the sound of blows by guards when they beat prisoners.

For the week I remained there, they would neither feed nor clothe

me, and except for when they would open the doors to spray me with a high-pressure water hose, and then open the windows to freeze my ass off with a blast of wintry air, I was left alone night and day. I caught pneumonia as a result and almost died. When they saw I was real sick and that my death would cause the other prisoners to revolt, they decided to see that I got some kind of medical attention. They made arrangements to send me to the prison hospital in Springfield, Missouri.

But even though I was being transferred by prison officials, who hoped to end the uprising, this did not happen. Although the prison officials ultimately took back administrative control from the "rioters," the prison was never the same place. Because of the united prisoner population at Terre Haute, the prison had strikes and violent protests for years afterward. The unity of the prisoners made many things possible: the creation of the Indiana prisoners' labor union, which fought for better working and living conditions, an end to the racially motivated killing and organizing by groups like the Klan, and of course better overall treatment. Some of the most brutal guards were fired or prosecuted after they had beaten or tortured prisoners, something which had never happened before.

Although I was to go through many years of torture at Springfield, Marion (Illinois), and other prisons, I lived through it all. I remember many things about those fifteen years in prison, but the struggle at Terre Haute, and how even whites who had been following the Klan line for many years rose up with the blacks against the prison officials was one thing I will never forget.

LETTERS FROM LUCASVILLE PRISON

BY CHRYSTOF KNECHT

Editors' note. In April, 1993, there was a rebelllion of prisoners at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, which is located in Lucasville. Race Traitor *wrote to Chrystof Knecht, a prisoner at SOCF, asking him for information about race relations in the prison. His reply came in two letters, which we have merged.*

To the Editor:

Revolutionary Greetings. Thank you for your letter and the material you enclosed. I enjoyed it very much and have passed it along to some of my prison brothers to read.

The Aryan Brotherhood was initiated in the California prison system in the 1960s in response to the racial struggle taking place. It was originally designed to protect white prisoners, and its prison philosophy dealt with giving other racial groups mutual respect so long as the racial line was not crossed. Once the AB was recognized as a "power" within the prison system, its activities soon expanded to monopolizing the prison drug trade, extortion, intimidation, and killing. Several AB prisoners were actually kicked out of the California prison system and sent to the federal prison system. Once there, these prisoners redesigned the AB. A three-man commission was put together to control its members and activities. To become a member, you had to "make bones"--to kill. You must have a killer instinct to be in. The federal AB is to be among the elite. It was not for every white prisoner. Thus the federal AB eliminated altogether the protection aspect that was its original purpose. This "new" AB policy has been implemented throughout several state and federal prisons across the nation, outside prison walls, and in some other countries.

At Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, there are two AB factions: one which combines the original philosophy from the 60s with the policy at the federal prisons--except not all have "made their bones;" and the other faction which is pseudo insofar as they are simply labeled as AB because of their tattoos and racial beliefs.

The animosity among the AB and the Black Muslims is silent animosity. It is not openly discussed. These groups will not attack one

another unless that invisible line has been crossed. When that line has been crossed via disrespect, stabbing, or killing of a prisoner of another race, retribution comes into play until the "score" has been evened out. Settling scores is just a theory--not reality. The AB has much more "power"--racist guards supply weapons, distribute contracts, and "look the other way," or create the killing zone (i.e., order the victim to be somewhere at a specific time). Respected prisoners can approach certain guards, pay them money to have someone killed or stabbed, and the guard will take a percentage, transfer the money into drugs and give such to an AB prisoner to make the hit.

The animosity between the groups was set aside due to the indiscriminate oppressive treatment placed on all SOCF prisoners with the appointment of Arthur Tate, Jr. as SOCF Warden in October, 1990. Under Tate's regime, SOCF prisoners were told how and when to eat, sleep, talk, walk, educate, bathe, and recreate. Privileges were taken away on a regular basis. New rules were enforced daily, disregarded, then re-implemented weeks later. Psychological conditioning techniques were upgraded. Integration was enforced and agitated by guards to create racial animosity in the form of fights and deeper racial hatred.

It has been a living nightmare since Warden Tate came into power, and prisoners were pushed as far back in the corner as they could be when they finally revolted. This is why racial animosities were set aside. The conditions as SOCF affected all races and these groups understood that only in unity would they be able to effectively rise up as one strong unit and protest the oppressive conditions. It could be said that these groups' hatred was deeper with respect to the prison system than with respect to race.

Unfortunately, the uprising has not brought about change among these groups. More respect, yes, but racial animosities continue. The AB sees its cooperation with these other groups as necessary. It had to be done--there was no in-between or compromise. Had these oppressive measures only affected one race, then cooperation would have been limited and probably would have resulted in a race war in SOCF. These groups now know that they can count on one another if oppression again rises to grasp both races. Other than that, the AB will go back to their ways, as will the Black Muslims.

Since the uprising, SOCF prison officials have been retaliating against suspected black leaders, due to rumors that a black gang ordered the hit on the guard that was slain. This was and is a tactic to make it look as if black prisoners created the entire situation, whereas the AB escapes again due to their influence over numerous prisoncrats. White guards recently created another killing zone, where two AB prisoners

mysteriously came out of their handcuffs on their way to outside recreation and stabbed a handcuffed black prisoner forty-four times while white guards stood and watched. One guard was cut, but that was planned to make it seem as if the guards were not sanctioning the score-settling. Nothing changes. Fortunately, the prisoner lived.

In this letter I have relied on my past membership in the AB (Tennessee chapter) and leadership in other race organizations as the basis for my knowledge of the AB. Due to my progressive steps in becoming an anarchist, I view all racial organizations as oppressive, ignorant, and stupid. A few of our relevant concerns are the discontinuation of nepotistic hiring practices, more minority guards, and public pressure put on the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate racism by guards and indict guards who have brutalized us. We have been trying to get the Justice Department interested in investigating.

Please send me a copy of whatever you print concerning the SOCF. I am a jail-house lawyer and political activist and am often retaliated against by prison officials for criticizing them. I try to keep articles that I wrote or in some way was involved with.

Chryztof Knecht
SOCF R142749
PO Box 45699
Lucasville, Ohio 45699-0001
August 23, October 28, 1993

When We Don't Get Race, It Kills Us

BY MAB SEGREST

Those of you making your first trip South may already be disoriented by our peculiar blend of hospitality and repression, which comes from having spent 246 of the last 374 years as a slave culture. But it's important for all of us to understand the history of racism in the United States--in which the South has played a particularly visible but by no means singular role. If coming South reminds us of this, so much the better. If the South is the cradle of the Confederacy, and of many subsequent right-wing movements, it is also the mother of all resistance, the heir to generations of Africans' determination to be free, from the moment they set foot on the slave ships, all across the Middle Passage, to the long, cold, white nightmare on this continent. The South is the heir to their creativity. For however destructively white supremacist culture has defined them, African Americans have continually recreated themselves, have known in their songs and in their hearts before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave. I call some of their names, a verbal libation: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Fanny Lou Hamer. We meet on their ground, and on the ground of Tuscaroras, Algonquins, Cherokee, Lumbee, Sioux, who fought their own wars with the U.S. Army, the long and brutal history of which should remind our movement what it means to take on the U.S. military, arguably the most repressive force in the world.

I am honored this morning, but I also feel urgent. I am afraid that I will not explain clearly enough my conviction that as a movement we have to understand racism more fully if we are to survive, and that we cannot understand racism if we do not understand the anti-human virulence of capitalism. If we did, we would behave differently--position

This is the text of a talk given on November 12, 1993 at the Creating Change Conference held in Durham, N.C., sponsored by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. Mab Segrest is an activist, co-editor of Feminary: A Lesbian-Feminist Journal *and* The Third Wave: Feminist Essays on Racism *(forthcoming) and author of* My Mama's Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture *and a forthcoming book,* Memoirs of a Race Traitor, *to be published by South End Press.*

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our movement differently, structure our organizations differently, develop and respect our leaders differently. For we are at a critical juncture. A year and a week ago, Amendment 2 won in Colorado, and last week we lost all three homophobic ballot initiatives--in Cincinnati, Maine, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Right is building its base on a homophobia as volatile as the firs that recently swept through the canyons of southern California. Yes, the gay movement has more visibility, more access to corridors of power, than we ever had. But unfortunately, our biggest ally, the President, is a weak man in a weak position. To meet the emergencies the Right presents us will require of us a conceptual shift, a new paradigm to take us into a new century.

Our failure to understand racism is killing us. Maybe twenty years ago, our movement and institutions had the luxury of stupidity. Maybe twenty years ago, white queers could approach issues of racism out of guilt, or a desire to be liked, or to be "good." Maybe then we could offer token jobs and token recognition to people of color, saving the decision-making, the real power, for the folks who looked like the President, or the Chief Justice, or the CEO of Exxon. But the Right has called our diversity bluff, the wildfire of their insurgent fascism is sweeping down the canyons that divide us, and we must respond to racism now for our own survival--to save our little whites asses. And we should be thankful for the opportunity.

When we don't get race, it kills us. When we don't understand capitalism, we are not only more confused about race, not only do we confuse power with money, not only do we deny our clearest voices--we also fail to understand the forces driving the history of our times. We won't have successful strategies if we don't understand our times. If we don't understand why things are happening to us now, we will never have the vision to seize the future and shape it.

Last year, as part of my new job for the Urban-Rural Mission of the World Council of Churches, I traveled to Juarez, Mexico, to visit the maquiladoras. Fortune 500 companies built these factories, or "twin plants," along the U.S.-Mexican border in the 1970s when the Mexican President, faced with mounting pressure from his country's international debt, developed "free trade zones." First we toured the industrial districts, driving past rows of seemingly innocuous factories. Then we went behind one of the maquilas. Mexican families lived in houses made from cardboard and scrap lumber on the other side of a drainage ditch. There was an acrid smell rising from ditch water the bright green color of astroturf. A pipe from the plant fed unprocessed waste the color and consistency of breast milk into the water.

Families washed and did their laundry in the polluted water. Our

guide later showed us pictures of babies born to women maquila workers in Brownsville, Texas--babies who had no brains. The workers in these factories are 70 percent women.

Then we went to visit a colonia, a poor neighborhood where maquila workers live. As we rounded the hill, I looked out to the horizon, and all I could see were scores of the same cardboard houses. They stretched from mesa to mesa for acres, the pattern broken by an occasional power line or by water brought in in old chemical barrels.

There on the hill outside of Juarez, the taste of its dust in my mouth, I found myself face-to-face with the latest manifestation of virulent capitalism in which masses of humanity become pawns for massive profits for a few. What does this mean, I thought, to gay people?

In the 1980s, Reagan and Bush and their Republican buddies stole this country. Their savings-and-loan scam is costing us millions; they pumped up the deficit to $4 trillion with inflated military spending, then dropped a lot of that hardware on the unfortunate people of Iraq--in half-million-dollar installments as smart bombs over Baghdad--with every bomb, BAM! another school, BAM! another AIDS research project, BAM! BAM! bridges and sewer systems, BAM! low-income housing projects. The US military also killed 200,000. I, for one, was proud when the Task Force opposed that war--as a lesbian, but also as a human being.

Corporations have also stolen our national resources. Faced by increasing foreign competition in the 1960s and 1970s, the men who run the multinationals responded with mergers and hostile takeovers to try for fast profits, rather than re-tooling basic industries. Rather than improve products, they cut labor costs--by attacking unions and by sending our basic industries to Third World Countries, where people work for one-tenth the wages (maquila workers make four dollars a day). They de-industrialized the United States. The situation in the maquilas is one result, and if NAFTA passes, the maquila economy will spread to all of Mexico, and eventually all of Latin America and back north.

How does this affect us? As a Durhamite, let me orient you to a bit more of where you are. You are meeting in Buck Duke's town--James B. Duke, nineteenth-century tobacco baron, built his fortune by teaching the world to smoke his cigarettes. If you walk a block east up Chapel Hill Street, you come to the post office. In the tobacco heyday of Durham it sold $1 million a day in revenue stamps for the 90 million packs of cigarettes a day produced in Durham's tobacco factories.

If you go in the other direction past Brightleaf Square (tobacco warehouses converted to shops and restaurants), you come to Ninth Street--bookstores, lesbian ice cream, a great bakery, and across the

street expensive condos. They used to be Erwin Mills, one of the many textile mills built at the turn of the century in the rapidly industrializing South. These factories drew poor whites off of depressed farms for low wages and white privilege. Many jobs came to these Southern textile mills from the northeast because the South had cheaper wages than unionized northern shops. In the 1930s, strikes were brutally repressed by companies, the governors, and the National Guard. In the past fifteen years, we have lost many of these jobs to automation, or to even cheaper labor in Third World countries, where the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. military have maintained poverty conditions and a ready workforce--as similar forces did in North Carolina.

In 1990 North Carolina ranked 46 of 50 in overall labor climate from the workers' perspective--and #1 in labor market opportunities, from the perspective of the employer. This month, Fortune named Durham-Chapel Hill-Raleigh as the best place to do business in the United States. Yet one-third of Durham's families live in poverty, mostly Black, mostly female-headed households.

Now some of you may be thinking, why is she going on so about Durham and North Carolina? I'm just here for the weekend. So let me approach it another way. If you have concerns about Jesse Helms and the havoc he wreaks for lesbians and gay men--his manipulation of the NEA, his demonization of us, his attacks on AIDS funding, or just for aesthetic reasons, seeing how he is ugly as he is mean--if you care about Jesse Helms, then you care about these conditions in North Carolina. They created him and they are creating others like him all across the country to take his place when he is dead (which may be soon, given that he has had trouble with his prostate and his heart--conditions some of us might consider poetic justice).

Similar circumstances in Virginia have bred Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell and a religious Right that draws on deep regional roots. You are meeting in the Bible Belt, but originally it was those folks in Massachusetts who were burning women as witches and merging government with their Fuhrer's version of God. Thomas Jefferson, the slavemaster from Virginia, insisted on the separation of church and state. But in the three decades before the Civil War, the South called on all its institutions to defend slavery against growing opposition. Then the government merged with reactionary religion in this repressive way. Now the Virginia-based Christian Coalition's 386 radio stations reach all over the globe.

As the South goes, so goes the Nation. As North Carolina goes (losing jobs to automation and "economic integration") so goes your state. And the real problem, with this region and this country, is that slavery

was never really abolished. It just got re-instituted in other forms. We HOMOSEXUALS should not be surprised when this country does not treat us right.

We can meet 'til the cows come home on how to FIGHT THE RIGHT without recognizing that in some cases we are the Right. Lance Hill, who directed the Louisiana campaigns against David Duke's candidacies, told me that Duke's campaign for Governor in 1990 was active in the gay bars of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Neo-Nazis could have access there because those bars are largely segregated. We gay people look with justified concern at the way the Religious Right uses homophobia to divide, for example, the African American community, to persuade some of its church people to organize against us to their own destruction. We need to look with equal concern at the practices of our movement, our community, which are also the dry wood on which fascism burns. For many gay and lesbian people of color, it is every bit as much an expense of spirit to be in a room with us radical queer white activists as with the most hair-raising fundamentalist minister, just as exhausting and insulting. We can no longer take the presence of our brothers and sisters of color among us for granted, their talents and their resources. The arsonists of the Christian coalitions have lit their fires, and the hot winds are rising.

As we go on the defensive, state-by-state, fighting the Right, we should seriously consider the possibility that it's not the people who can write checks for $100 thousand, $500 thousand, $1 million, who know most strategically how to spend that money. Maybe acquiring that much money has numbed these people, or at least buffered them from the need to come together with the most possible people in strategies of empowerment. Perhaps one of their secretaries knows more than they do about the needed strategy. As we walk the corridors of power, it may not be our lobbyists, our congressmen, the queer appointments in a Democratic administration who carry the real secret to our success. It may be the unseen lesbian secretaries and gay janitors, the homeless queer men and bag ladies who try to get in from the cold, who are as much the source of our power.

For they know that no movement or person in this country can escape the repression and dehumanization that was required for genocide of Native peoples and the enslavement of Africans. That's what we fight when we FIGHT THE RIGHT. Let our presence in this South this weekend remind us of that. The only "Special Right" that the United States gives to minorities is the right to be the target of genocidal policies.

Let me give you an example, from my home town of Tuskegee,

Alabama.

In 1932, officials from the United States Public Health Service began a study of the effects of untreated syphilis on Black men in Macon County, Alabama. It involved 399 men who were in advanced stages of syphilis. Over the years, they received a variety of tests and medical examinations and, upon death, autopsies--but not penicillin. They were told only that they had "bad blood." Public health officials knowingly allowed the men to infect their women and men partners and their children in an experiment that had no "scientific" value, until an Associated Press reporter broke the story in 1972, less than a decade before the same Center for Disease Control overseeing the Tuskegee experiment would begin to deal with AIDS. In fact, David Sencer was director of the CDC in 1972 when the Tuskegee story broke and in 1979 when AIDS first came to his agency's attention. Sencer went on to become New York City Health Commissioner in 1982, where he and Mayor Koch were grossly negligent in their response to AIDS.

"Thou shalt keep thy blood pure," early German Nazi propaganda decreed. In Mein Kampf, Hitler elaborated, "Blood sin and desecration of the race are the original sin in this world." This metaphoric use of blood to denote racial purity was a staple of the widespread racist thinking in Europe and the United States a hundred years ago. In Hitler's mind, not only miscegenation but venereal disease polluted the Aryan's "pure blood," which he called the "syphilization" of the German people. In the Nazi mind, germs, bacteria, and viruses did not cause disease. Jews caused disease because they were, inherently, diseased. Within U.S. racist ideology, African-Americans have suffered from a similar identification with disease, and now gay people do. If homophobia were the only problem in this culture, we would have cleaned it up in the past twenty years.

The medical and scientific establishment would never have responded so disastrously slowly to AIDS in gay men and intravenous drug users if racist ideology had not already permeated institutions of medicine and health, establishing thought processes and bureaucratic procedures that allowed whole groups to become expendable. Homophobic violence would also never have erupted with the force it did in response to lesbian and gay liberation if there were not already a high cultural and judicial tolerance for racist and sexist violence.

And AIDS would not be hitting communities of color with such intensity now if homophobia had not allowed the epidemic in its early years, when it was understood as a "gay disease," to rage unchecked.

For all of us, what goes around comes around, and any one of us can begin to break the cycle.

Approaches to racism have also shaped the debates within our own community on issues such as passing and assimilation, radical transformation vs. reform, legal strategies vs. empowerment of the grassroots. One of the dominant paradigms for dealing with race in the twentieth century emerged from the University of Chicago in the 1920s. It was called the ethnicity model, and it explained that immigrants to the U.S. go through cycles of contact and conflict then assimilation. Now this theory, on the one hand, was an improvement over the dominant paradigm it replaced, which was the biological approach to race, that saw racial differences as inherited and which justified slavery and colonialism. But the ethnicity paradigm was also based in European existence, not the experience of people of color. At the same time that European immigrants were being assimilated--if painfully--into our economy, Jim Crow reigned in the South for African Americans, Asians were kept out of the country altogether by immigration quotas, Native Americans were suffering record rates of poverty on a land base once again decimated by white theft, and Chicanas were forming their own mutualistas in the Southwest in the face of racist white unions. So this business of assimilation operates differently above and below the color lines, as do most manifestations of American "Democracy." If we (generic whitefolks) set our goal as a movement to being assimilated into American culture, to getting "our piece of the pie," we ignore or deny the reality that gay and lesbian people of color will never be assimilated in the same way within this system because it was constituted to exclude them.

If we follow the ethnicity theory, we tend to believe that the issue of "homophobia" is mainly a matter of personal prejudice, which contact with us will defuse. We ignore the extent to which the most powerful political and economic forces in this country have an investment in our degradation to build up their grassroots base and their funding chests, distracting people from the corporate theft that may beggar us all.

The assimilation model leads to "outing" powerful, rich people to show that they, too, are gay. It leads to surveys that tout the marketing power of the gay dollar and position us as a movement of the middle to the upper class, with higher than average spending power. At the same time, we deny visible leadership to people of color and working-class white gay men and lesbians. This dynamic sets us up to be a "buffer class" in a similar way that Jews were in Europe to draw off class anger from the economic elite who are really making the decisions and reaping the rewards in a period of national economic crisis and decline. It makes us appear narrow and selfish (which I do not think we are), cuts us off from allies, at the same time it increases our danger.

Now the two models of race thinking that emerged to counter the

ethnicity model were nationalism and socialism. I would argue we have opted for the wrong model. We don't need a queer nationalism; we need a queer socialism, that is by necessity anti-racist and feminist, a politic that does not cut us off from other people but that unites us with them in the broadest possible movement.

This Queer Socialism would recognize the damage done by five hundred years of colonial rule. People of color have suffered for five hundred years from the European/Christian war between mind and body, soul and body, projected onto cultures that often had more holistic world-views and darker skins. The same mind/body split allows the hundred white men owning poultry plants in Mississippi to tell the Black women workers "we only want your bodies, not your minds," as those men lock the women into plants where twenty-seven out of thirty in one factory acquired carpel tunnel syndrome. It also defines gay men and lesbians in this period as only perverse bodies engaged in sinful/sick/illegal physical acts as "abomination." And it discards the old and the disabled.

A Queer Socialism would clarify our role as workers, means of production; and the same way we are defined by an obsession with our bodies and our sexuality, Black women in Mississippi poultry plants and Mexican women in maquilas are also defined as only bodies, to be used and discarded, machines without feelings and souls. It would help us understand more fully how our fates are implicated in theirs. And, once we had the opportunity to respond to their crises and we did not, why the fuck should anyone ever care anything about us again?

We would bring our insights and strengths to progressive struggles. A Queer Socialism would be inevitably inflected for gender, would have our anger and our militancy, our humor and our flair, and would shape a movement that includes many gay and lesbian homeless people, some of them cross dressers, many people of color. We know that in some cultures that do not hate the body, the male and female principles are not so at war as they are in this culture, and people like the berdache in American Indian societies are considered holy people--as we are holy people. We gay people bring the knowledge that we humans are not only "means of production," however much capitalism seeks to define us that way. Our needs include not only the survival needs of food, shelter, health care, and clothing, but also dignity, pleasure, intimacy, and love. We bring our grief and our creativity in the too-familiar face of death. I have watched my gay brothers care for one another to the grave. I've been around a good bit, and I have not witnessed this particular quality other places in the same way. And many of these are white men, middle-class men, who have taught me about courage and compassion.

None of this is about categories we can't escape. It's about who we choose to be.

We also bring the ability to create familial love that does not depend on biology, on the worship of our own gene pools. Those non-biological parents among us know that we can love and parent any child--it mainly requires our rapt attention to an unfolding wonder--and that the children in the inner cities, the babies born in the maquilas, are also our children.

A Queer Socialism would not be provincially urban. It would recognize that the most crucial battles for gay/lesbian politics in the next decade will not be in the cities where we have our power base, where most of our people are concentrated. The Right has finally figured out to take us on on their turf, not ours. These battles will be in areas that are more rural and historically more conservative. In those areas, we will develop new models, not dependent on a critical gas mass and gay infrastructure. A Queer Socialism will create broad-based movements against homophobia rather than movements only for gay and lesbian rights. It will hold heterosexuals accountable for heterosexism, generating heterosexual allies, then trusting them to do their jobs. The trust we gain in this process is one of the opportunities within the crisis.

In my vision of a reinvigorated movement, the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force would take a stand on major issues such as the North American Free Trade Acts: against NAFTA and in solidarity with working people, who are most of our people; in recognition that unemployed people (which NAFTA will generate) are six times more likely to commit acts of violence than people who are employed, and some of that will be hate violence; and in recognition that NAFTA will override our national and local laws on labor and environmental standards (as "unfair labor practices"), constricting once again this country's democratic possibilities.

In my movement, the Task Force would call up Ben Chavis, new NAACP director, and say, "Rev. Chavis, thank you for your support of the March on Washington"--for which he came under serious attack from within his own organization--"and we'd like to return the favor." We'd say, "The next time a big vote on racism comes up in Congress, we'll be there with you, with our hundred thousand members and our $4 million budget, because we appreciate your help and because that's about our people, too." My movement wouldn't avoid these stands for fear it would divide our constituency--which is already divided; it would take them to unite us around broader principles.

In OUR movement, we see the opportunity in the crisis--to do what we should have done twenty-five years ago, put the determination to keep faith with one another by not tolerating racism, sexism, or class

divisions in ourselves or in our organizations.

In our movement we don't panic or blame ourselves, we stay accountable and take the long view. The Quincentenary gave us the opportunity to reflect on five hundred years of resistance. The people of color among us let us know that is not a decade's or even a lifetime's struggle. How we treat one another matters more than any particular "win."

In our movement, we seize the opportunity to face our own fears and isolation in the messages of the Right and stare them down. As Creek poet Joy Harjo wrote,

> Oh, you have choked me, but I gave you the leash,
> You have gutted me, but I gave you the knife,
> You have devoured me, but I gave you the heated thing
> I take myself back, fear.

In our movement, we claim not more or less than our human place among the creatures on the planet. Queer Socialism moves us to the post-Queer.

This re-energized movement will be, in Suzanne Pharr's eloquent terms, "not a wedge, but a bridge"; not a point of division, but of expansion and connection. A bridge, not a wedge. A bridge, not a wedge. It has a nice rhythm to it. We can say it like a mantra when we feel the Right getting too hot. Folks from San Francisco can help us in this imaging--all those bays, all that steel hanging up in the air and cars got the nerve to drive across it. How does it stay up there, anyway, across the blue expanse?

Yes, the fires are burning. But think of all that water. And, even in a hot wind, bridges will sing.

FREE TO BE ME

According to press reports and our own correspondents, the white race is showing signs of fracture in the rural midwest. Several female students at North Newton Junior-Senior High School near Morocco, Indiana, who call themselves the "Free to Be Me" group, recently started braiding their hair in dreadlocks and wearing baggy jeans and combat boots, a style identified with Hip-Hop culture. Morocco is a small farming town seventy miles south of Chicago; of the 850 students at the school, two are black. Whites in the town accuse the group of "acting black," and male students have reacted by calling them names, spitting at them, punching and pushing them into lockers, and threatening them with further violence. Since mid-November there have been death threats, a bomb scare, and a Ku Klux Klan rally at the school. "This is a white community," said one sixteen-year-old male student. "If they don't want to be white, they should leave."

Several of the Free to Be Me group told the story December 3 on the Montel Williams Show, a black-hosted TV talk show that comes out of New York and is aired nationally. After they returned to Indiana they were subjected to further harassment: four were suspended for refusing to remove their headbands, which are in violation of the school's dress code, and dozens more have left school because they feared for their safety. One said, "It's gotten to the point where you can't think in your classes because all you can think about is what they are going to do to you in the halls." One of the two black students in the school has been the target of threats and harassment since he started there; he also has withdrawn from the school. His mother, who is not Afro-American, appeared on the show, her face covered with bruises, and reported that she was attacked by two white men while she was shopping in town.

On the day of the Klan rally, many students braided their hair and wore hand-lettered "Free to Be Me" buttons to school. There have also been rumors that black youth from other communities were coming to settle accounts.

"My girl was slammed in the face because her hair was in braids," said the mother of one thirteen-year-old. This incident reveals, among other things, the tremendous power of crossover culture to undermine both white solidarity and male authority.

Richmond Journal: Thirty Years in Black & White

BY EDWARD H. PEEPLES

White Bread and Black People

It must have been 1944, 1945, or even shortly after World War II. Many different foodstuffs, gasoline, and other consumer products were rationed or at least in very short supply. Life was lean. From what I could see, the Great Depression was not yet over in the Richmond I knew. My father had lost a series of jobs, mostly in the grocery business, and my mother had returned to work in her profession as a "hairdresser."

We and many others like us had to make do. I had no notion that the sacrifice wasn't universal, as most folks I knew thought our suffering was not only inevitable but noble as it would hasten the day when we would crush Hitler, Tojo and Mussolini. Whatever economic deprivation I may have endured at the time did not seem to me to be particularly acute, as my preoccupation during that period was with the painful consequences of living under the same roof as a violence-prone alcoholic father.

However, I do especially remember shoes being in short supply around my house on West 28th Street and the familial turmoil it seemed to generate. The soles of my pair kept coming loose and would flap about as I walked to school. I can still recall distinctly how my mother would scream at my father for his inclination to lose jobs, his apparent inability to provide steady income, his drinking, and most memorably, his continuing failure to provide his oldest son with a decent pair of shoes to wear to school and church.

My mother was nevertheless very resourceful. For example, she persuaded my uncle Bubbie, who worked the night shift at the Dupont plant on the Petersburg Pike, to smuggle out small scraps of material left over from parachutes made for the war effort. My mother and her sister, Vela, used the scraps to make great silk patch quilts. They were lovely and were greatly appreciated by my younger brother and I when coal shortages left us with a very chilly house on winter nights.

My mother was not only resourceful but was a very persuasive individual with an unusual business savvy. Late in WW II, she met and was

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apparently befriended by a local labor union leader, who I knew as Mr. Hughes. Mr. Hughes was the most prosperous person with whom I had ever been acquainted. He had an office downtown on Grace Street and I think owned several businesses around the city, including a beauty shoppe in which my mother worked. He seemed to be very interested in and helpful to my mother--and me. As a child, I was perhaps unusually skilled for my age as a bicycle mechanic and woodworker. So Mr. Hughes would occasionally hire me to build shelves, partitions, a dirty towel bin, and other items for his office and beauty shoppe.

Through this man, my mother somehow secured the financial wherewithal to open a small grocery store on East 22nd Street. It was just one block off the Petersburg Pike, aka the Jeff Davis Highway, near the Model Tobacco Company and the Lucky Strike cigarette factory, sources of employment for vast numbers of both black and white Richmonders. The store was presumably my father's to operate. I never was to learn who actually owned the place, but I did come to understand that I, as a nine year old, was expected to do my time there after school and on Saturdays.

While "our boys" were all across the globe fighting for freedom and democracy--albeit in racially segregated military units--we didn't have much democracy on the home front, at least not in the old Capitol of the Confederacy. Richmond was a totally segregated city. Blacks were relegated to the worst housing, jobs, schools, and recreational facilities. Their movement was restricted; they endured ceaseless daily indignities, and faced discrimination and danger everywhere. They were not even allowed to try on shoes or clothes before they purchased them at Baldwins Department Store on Hull Street and Thalhimers and Miller and Rhoads downtown. No one too young to have personally witnessed the realities of segregation would today appreciate the extent of its hurtful impact on blacks and its psychological numbing effect on whites at the time.

As a young child, I had not a clue that anything was wrong or unjust. I met not a single soul in the first eighteen years of my life who ever once spoke up as a critic of segregation, even during the four times a week I spent in our Baptist church. To the contrary, in every institution and from the lips of every single adult whom I was instructed to emulate, I heard nothing about race unless it was about the superiority of whites or the inferiority of blacks. I, my brother, and everyone else I knew, had no way to learn that it could be different. White supremacy, as thoughts and acts, was to us as natural a phenomenon as was the sunrise.

My father as an adult was no exception to other racists of the era, unless it was that he had grown up in an even more virulent racist environment than most. His childhood and adolescence were spent in rural South Carolina at the first of this century following the demise of

Reconstruction which had been masterminded by Wade Hampton and his followers. In fact, my grandfather had been a "lieutenant" in Hampton's Red Shirts, a notorious vigilante group which, upon horseback, terrorized blacks and reconstructionists in the late decades of the 19th century. My father, I was to later learn, had witnessed without pangs of penitence several lynchings of blacks. He then, like me in my youth, never had a way to know that this vile view of the world was wrong or unnatural.

This was the racial world which I inherited and knew, and to which I was trustingly pliant. And it was also the context in which my father conducted his small grocery business in this southside Richmond neighborhood. So during this period of shortages during WW II my father always favored whites who came into the store whether he knew them personally or not. If a black individual came in--and many did for they worked at the tobacco factories and lived nearby--and asked for a scarce item such as butter, sugar, or bread, he would deny that he had such commodities. He had hid them under the counter or in a corner of the meat cooler. If whites came in and made similar requests, he would pull out the item and sell it to them. He instructed me to do the same when I was alone in the front of the store.

But my father was a drinker. And the store really had very little traffic so he had a lot of opportunity to indulge in his habit. I never actually saw him take the nip but it was abundantly clear to me when he became incapacitated. He would disappear into the backroom and fall into a stupor onto an army cot which he kept there for that purpose. This, of course, left his young son in charge of the store. So whenever I was not in school, I would find myself alone as the grocery clerk.

As I recall, it was around four o'clock in the afternoon when the day shift at Model Tobacco would let out. Several of the workers would then stop by our store to pick up a few things. Since bread was among the scarce items, almost everyone of them would ask for bread. We would have a day's stock of about twelve loaves of the local white Noldes bread stowed under the counter. If the customer was white, I would pull out a loaf and sell it to them. Initially, if the customer was black, I would parrot my father's words and insist that "We're all out."

But as time went on, my father seemed more withdrawn, and as I grew to feel that I was more in control of the store during these hours, an unexplainable development occurred. I remember it vividly.

One summer afternoon an attractive black woman in work clothes, perhaps in her late thirties, walked into our patron-less store after the day shift. She seemed to be very tired and somewhat preoccupied. She collected a few items from the shelves and laid them down on the counter.

For no apparent reason, I was seized by an immense curiosity about her. I stared at her and pondered about what her life must be like. Was she married? Did she have any children? Could she have a young son like me? My thoughts about her were interrupted by her words--"And I would like a loaf of bread."

I could not elude my fascination with this woman. There was something in her face that drew me toward a sense of familiarity and kinship with her, even if everything in my upbringing told me that she was of another species and my feelings of affinity were unnatural. Perhaps I was drawn to her because I observed in her face some of the same signs of adversity and weariness I often saw in my own mother's face. Or, perhaps in some primitive way, I sensed that we both shared a burden of cruelty in our lives. But whatever was the source of this perceived connection, it had for me an almost magical effect. For perhaps the first time in my brief life, I saw in her no mythical figure invented and embellished by white fear and ignorance. Rather, in my mind for these few fleeting moments at least, I perceived a person, who like everyone else I knew, just wanted to get through the burdensome effects of this, the last great war in behalf of freedom and democracy. Sadly, my next escape from the deadly imagery of white racial folklore was to come only years later.

She repeated her request with emphasis--"And a loaf of bread!" Her words broke my concentration. "Uh... Yea," I said and reached under the counter and brought out a loaf of bread in the familiar blue Noldes wrapper. I laid it beside the rest of her order.

Of course, I have long forgotten how much money she gave me. I do recall that I gave her change and watched her pick up her bag, walk slowly through the double screen door, down the four steps to the sidewalk, and then out of sight. However, my imagination followed her all the way home where I saw her trudge into her house, drop her grocery bag onto the kitchen table in exhaustion, and then flop down onto her living room sofa--as I had seen my own mother do so often after a hard day's work. And in my mind, I saw her young son race into the kitchen, reach into the grocery bag, lift out the bread in the dark blue wrapper, rip open the end of it, pull out a fresh fluffy piece of white bread, and eat it with great singularity of pleasure.

From that time on, my father would periodically ask me why was the bread always sold out so early when I was out in the front of the store. I told him that we were having a lot more white customers coming in now.

THE PRICE OF VICTORY

It was suppertime on December 3, 1955. The Gallaudet College basketball team had arrived by bus from Washington, DC for tonight's game with the Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University) "Green Devils." The Gallaudet players and staff were famished, as athletes often become when they go on the road. The fact that all the players were deaf and their speech could not be easily understood did not make it any less clear that they were ready to eat. My job, in return for my small basketball scholarship, was to play host to all the visiting teams. So, I led our Gallaudet guests down the steps of Founder's Hall into the college cafeteria and ushered them through the food line.

Of course, this was the era of racial segregation and the infamous doctrine of "Massive Resistance" created by James Jackson Kilpatrick and the "Byrd Machine" in reaction to the U.S. Supreme Court's school desegregation orders of 1954 and 1955. Included among its sundry white supremacist provisions was a ban on interracial athletic competition at state colleges. So anyone who was likely to put a chink in the armor of segregation was considered the ultimate traitor. RPI, the city of Richmond, and the entire Commonwealth of Virginia were like the rest of the South, under the absolute hegemony of this legal apartheid.

Washington too was mostly segregated and so Gallaudet's players were all white. However, their bus driver was a black man, an individual whose image was to be seared into my memory for a lifetime. He was a short, slightly stocky man in his forties and he wore a dark cloth jacket and a busman's cap. He was a very quiet and unassuming person who to me, despite his height and race, blended into the line of the much taller basketball players who were filing through before the steam tables.

As it was the bus driver's turn to select his silverware, without any warning, it became quite evident that this or no other black man could blend freely into the fabric of life as lived here in Richmond, Virginia. When the cafeteria manager caught sight of him progressing through the line, he leaped around the rail, positioned himself in front of the surprised bus driver, and authoritatively proclaimed-- "you can't be served here!" Having stationed myself for ready assistance to our visitors within but a couple of feet of the line, I witnessed the entire scene.

The bus driver's initial shock, in but a moment, gave way to pliant resignation. Without any hint of anger, he set his tray down, turned around, and made his way past the tall young white men who were not to be denied their supper. All eyes were fixed on the bus driver as he walked a gauntlet of humiliation, even as a half dozen or so black cafete-

ria workers peered with cautious curiosity out of the door to the kitchen.

I was stunned by how this just ordinary man could maintain such poise and dignity in the face of his agonizing retreat from this piercing insult. His heroic bearing suddenly struck some heretofore idle nerve deep inside of me. While I had spent much of the prior year and a half trying to intellectually wrench myself from the clutches of a racist upbringing, this majestic march by a man I was never to really know, abruptly was awakening my sleeping soul to the true and profound evil of segregation and white supremacy. I found myself enraged!

I raced up to the cafeteria manager, who I knew well, and barked, "He is our guest! Where else can he eat? How can you do this?" None of my reputation as a basketball ace or as a BMOC held any sway here. While I was naive to much of the reality of racism, I was to be rudely instructed this evening--we were not alone. The ominous scepter of segregation was hanging heavy over us. I could not believe what was happening nor could I understand the intensity of my rage over it. I was by now making a scene. In the past, I would have not risked my reputation in such a situation, but today was a time in which I was to enter a new consciousness about race and what my soul was to command me to do about it.

Clearly, I embarrassed the cafeteria manager and his white staff with my failure to behave as whites were expected in racial matters. No doubt, I made the deaf Gallaudet basketball players uneasy as well, despite the fact that they could detect only fragments of what was happening. More significantly, I had also added grief to the Gallaudet bus driver's already heavy burden. In those days, it was more often assumed that even good and civil people do not protest in behalf of a victim of racial abuse because--as the reasoning went--by doing so, one would only draw further attention and harm to the victim. Moreover, the prospect of violence always hovered nearby as the ultimate arbiter of racial impropriety.

I was possessed. I ran to the telephone. I knew that Mr. English, the business manager of the college and an admirer of my basketball accomplishments and my record as a campus leader, would reverse the cafeteria manager's decision and rescue us from this shameless treatment of our guest. Unfortunately, Mr. English was more impressed by the state segregation laws than he was with my petty reputation as a campus hot dog at one of Virginia's least regarded colleges. He said "I'm sorry, but the law is the law." "So where is he to be fed as a guest of the college?" I retorted. Becoming irritated with me, he snapped, "I don't care where or what he eats, he just can't go through the line reserved for whites and he cannot eat in the cafeteria dining area."

Upon hanging up the phone I began to think -- the linchpin of segregation was the "separate but equal" doctrine, the contention that the wall between the races never really resulted in any inequities for Blacks. Here at RPI at this moment was a classic example of the absurdity of this claim and finally a 20 year old southerner could for the first time see this tragic truth in bold relief. He was never to be the same.

It struck me that if they would not treat our guest with the dignity he deserved, perhaps the best we could do would be to raise the price of preserving segregation, at least here and now. So with great embarrassment, I asked the bus driver if he would be willing, in order to eat, to take his meal in an adjacent building. He concluded that he had no choice in the matter, and so followed me over through an enclosed passageway to an unoccupied classroom next door. The room was full of those old ubiquitous school chairs with one arm used for a writing surface. I invited him to sit in one and tried to make him comfortable, a fruitless exercise at this point. I then told him I would be right back with his dinner. Returning to the cafeteria, I picked up a tray and proceeded to fill it with a salad, a serving each of roast beef, mashed potatoes, rolls and butter, a dessert, and a large glass of iced tea. Haughtily skipping past the cashier, I raced back to deliver the meal to my special guest.

He was sitting patiently. I set the tray down on the arm of a chair next to him and he approached his long awaited meal. "Wait," I said. "Don't eat yet, you haven't got all of the choices." He paused and hesitatingly agreed with my idea to return to the cafeteria to assemble a second tray of selections--so far available only to his white fellow travelers. I repeated my trip through the line, taking all new food items not selected during my first run. I raced again past the cashier, gloating over the fact that she could not stop me because I was complying with the letter of Mr. English's commandment. Meanwhile, everyone watched me and began to catch on to what I was doing. But they were too dumfounded by my antics to yet be able to figure out how to respond with that very special form of hostility and rebuke reserved only for whites who dared to chisel a crack in the wall of segregationist solidarity.

I hurried with the second tray back to my guest and again asked him to wait for one last tray. Scurrying back to the cafeteria, I grabbed a third tray, selected all the remaining choices which had not been on the first two trays, and hastily made my way past the exasperated cashier, the cafeteria manager, and all of the other vexed onlookers who now were steaming as they saw their precious racial conventions being tweaked by one of their own.

I delivered the third tray to my guest and informed him that he now had every single selection in front of him from which the whites had to

choose. A tiny smile came to his lips and then promptly disappeared. Without a word, he began to eat his lonesome feast. Groping for words that might heal some of the hurt, I said, "It's all yours, all of this, all three trays are yours. It cost them three times more to do you this way." He said nothing and just went on eating. I sat in another chair watching him in silence for a good five more minutes and then I bid him goodbye and left for the gym to get ready for the game. We won the game 74-61, but I got only 3 points. It was no triumph for me.

SUCH A SIMPLE ACT

(Written on the afternoon of February 20, 1960.)

Human dignity rolled over and rubbed her sleepy eyes in Richmond's Thalhimers Department Store today.

We arrived around noon at the Richmond Room. Standing there silently were some 50 well-dressed Negro young people of college age. Later we were to learn that most of them were students at Virginia Union University. They were grouped around the entrance to the dining room but the four or five feet across were blocked by a rope. Several white male store officials stood behind the rope inside the Richmond Room with their elbows in their palms, sometimes mumbling out the sides of their mouths in low authoritative tones. One very tall man neatly attired in a dark suit walked back and forth, up and down, the wrinkles growing more and more permanent on his forehead. His curly, perfectly parted hair streaked with gray told us they he was ranking executive present and represented the "Policy."

The Negroes were silent. Each stood expressionless and each held a book, I thought it to be a bible in their hand. Their eyes, however, belied their mute pacifism. I could see the tumultus storm raging in their eyes, their longings, their determinations, their hopes. But most of all, I could see in their eyes patience, a quiet, graceful, yet fervent patience seeming to me to be a quality especially invoked by some divine force for this remarkable moment. To me the blinking of their eyelids appeared like the first moments of flickering light on the newly illuminated marquee of a theater that had been closed and empty for years.

I had seen Negroes all my life, but to me there had never been this light. Nothing had ever shone with the radiance I saw today. Negro aspirations had always seemed to me to be boarded up like abandoned storefronts. While I had known that conditions were terribly wrong, I had really understood very little of their personal consciousness and desires about freedom. And they had no way to know of my painful identifica-

tion with their struggle.

But today, it was different, they were young and they believed in themselves. They also believed in peaceful means to overthrow this monster of segregation, for not one made a move that could have been interpreted as aggression. They just stood there, prayerfully still with only an occasional "clear the aisles" or "keep clear of the aisles please" spoken softly by two of the Negro leaders as they extended their arms to sweep demonstrators back into a neat aggregate. One of the leaders was a big handsome young man with a warm smile. The other was a short fellow with horn-rimmed glasses. His face was stern, but his voice was gentle.

The only noise or movement came from behind the rope inside the restaurant. More and more executives began to congregate, their foreheads wrinkled. They stood in circles whispering to each other, their arms folded across their chests, their faces looking more and more troubled by the minute.

At first, my three friends and I witnessed all of this from amidst the growing crowd of antagonistic, disbelieving onlookers standing about in the nearby toy department. As these tense moments wore on, each of the four of us wrestled singly and together with the prospects we would face were we to join the students. The consequences for the other three would have been so serious they eventually chose to leave the store. Despite the doubt and terror which gripped me, I finally made my way out of the white crowd and took my place with the Negro protestors. I knew none of them personally and none of them knew me. I nevertheless sensed an intense familiarity with each of them, as if we were all part of some great consciousness, far beyond ourselves.

Among the white spectators, I saw here and there faces I remembered from my childhood. I saw their heads tilt toward one another and their hands cover the words they were exchanging as they looked at me with vicious eyes at this traitor of their race. The rancor I felt by one elderly woman, who I vaguely recalled from Southside Richmond in the 1940's, was apparently too much for her to contain. With no warning, she marched up and spat in my face. In the first instant, I was simply startled. But as I pulled a handkerchief out of my pocket, I began to feel the heat of humiliation. I mopped my face as my heart cried out desperately inside me. "Don't you people understand?" But I knew they didn't. They were slaves to the Southern credo known as "Our Way of Life."

Every so often one of the student leaders would ceremoniously approach the rope barrier by the restaurant with a futile request to be admitted. In each instance, he was confronted by the tall, gray-haired executive who, with a scowl across his face and deep wrinkles on his

forehead, would shake his head "no."

After some time, this official unhooked the rope and started down the walkway formed by the students on each side of the entrance. One small pretty girl was positioned about six to eight inches out from the group in his path. As he walked by, he bumped her slightly. Upon feeling her impact, he quickly swung around and glared angrily into her beautiful golden brown face. His fists were clinched and he leaned forward with taut lips pressing hotly against each other. Her lower lip curled down and we could see that she was about to lash out. At that instant, the handsome student leader stepped up and took her hand. The tense look on her face turned into a tiny smile and the two amicably stepped back together into the group of students.

Some moments elapsed, and then two officers from the Fire Bureau arrived. They walked around quietly for the most part, but occasionally would stop in front of the demonstrators and demand in a vehement, rude tone, "clear the aisle!"

For what seemed like hours, I stood there with the students, for the first time in my life feeling what it was like to bear an irrevocable moral witness, to have my skin burn with the absolute rebuke of my own people. My chest pounded with fear, and inside my mind was screaming at the white store executives (some of whom attended college with me) "We are sick of this crazy, archaic, social inequality. We want it changed and we want it done here and now in Thalhimers."

While my thoughts were of anger and agony, I sensed the peaceful imperative from the other protestors. Somehow, even though it was uncharacteristic of me, I managed to continue to stand with them in silent revolt. I thought over and over again: "Is it worth it? What are we accomplishing? What if something disastrous happens--then the ascaris of the ideal would mean only an arrest, the loss of my job and I would have to leave Richmond, my home, and find work elsewhere.

"Then what about my family? They would be so hurt. Such a simple act--to stand quietly and passively in behalf of the fundamental American principle of equality. How could such a small act, so obviously justified, result in such grave consequences?"

Soon the thought was interrupted. The tall grey-headed executive was pointing at me and saying something to a newly arrived police captain in a smart brown uniform. The police officer, the executive, another policemen, and several other men walked the few steps over to me.

The captain demanded, "Are you from New York?" "No," I said. "Then where are you from?" he asked in an irritated voice. "Richmond," I replied. "Where do you live?" "The West End." "Are you a student?" "No, I am a City employee." "In what department?" "Welfare," I

responded. He stood dumbfounded for a few seconds and when he seemingly recovered, he asked my name. I told him. He then said, "You are going to be escorted from the store." The tall grey-headed man stepped forward and issued the order "Leave the store!"

With that, two large men in plain clothes each took one of my arms and led me to the escalator as the contempt of the white onlookers burned down my neck. Just before I reached the next floor below, the two men gave me a shove and I stumbled to my knees. They grasped me by the arms once again and herded me to the next escalator stairway and then the next, and so on until we reached the first floor.

I was then jostled along the Sixth Street exit and thrust onto the sidewalk. One man even shouted, "Don't you ever come back here," while the other burlier figure clapped his hands together making a loud popping sound as if he were ordering dogs to attack me.

I walked hastily home to my apartment at Franklin and Ryland Streets, seized by the frightening awareness that today I was ushered out of a door through which I could never return.

THE NEWS IN BLACK AND WHITE

To the best of my memory it was 1976 or 77. It was a warm, sunny spring day about one-thirty in the afternoon. I was by now distracted from the morning's heavy concentration, and was becoming conscious of being restless and very hungry. I stood up to stretch, looked out the window at the inviting sunshine, and persuaded myself that I deserved a real lunch and a walk to unwind.

The first stop on any self-respecting noon walk "uptown" from work for any hungry Richmonder would, of course, be at one of two gastronomic meccas, Thalhimer's takeout food department with their divine deviled crab or Angelo's hot dog emporium. Angelo's won out today because I wanted to sit down to eat.

Straddled on a stool at the counter packing away a hot dog heaped with fresh sweet onions and mustard, it occurred to me that I had not read the Richmond *Afro American* newspaper in several weeks. So upon paying my check, I decided to walk a few more blocks along Broad Street to the Greyhound Bus Station where there was a newsstand.

The bus station was its usual bustling crossroads, with a couple of hundred assorted would-be passengers and others--standing, walking, running, milling, sleeping, talking, shouting, and even singing. And of course, there were also the customary contingent of homeless people seeking roof and respite. The preponderance of faces in the bus station

were black, as has been typical of much of the history of downtown Richmond, a predominately black city. The small news shop, situated in a room off to the right of the waiting room, however, had but three or four black patrons inside. They were all standing about reading magazines and sundry other literary curiosities found at bus station newsstands everywhere.

I entered the news shop, headed straight for the newspapers in the rear, pausing only momentarily to get a glimpse of the cover story titles on some of the magazines on the rack to my left. Then I scanned across all of the tidy stacks of newspapers. First, of course, were great piles of the two metropolitan Richmond dailies, The Richmond *Times-Dispatch* and The Richmond *News Leader*. And to their right was a small heap of the current week's Richmond Afro-American, our only alternative to the arch conservative voice of political correctness published by Richmond Newspapers, Inc.

I picked up a copy of the two day old Afro, fumbled through my pocket for a quarter, walked the couple of steps over to the cashier, and laid the paper and the coin down on the counter in front of her.

The cashier was a gaunt middle-aged white woman, with pointed facial features and shallow rolling wrinkles, looking, as so many working class Virginians, severely worn down a life that has not come easy.

When the cashier caught sight of the paper I had selected, she stared at me for a moment, as if she was searching her cultural grab bag for the rules and words needed to advise a fool who is about to violate a natural law. Shortly, she put it all together and proclaimed, "You don't want this newspaper, it's the colored newspaper."

I had long endured attempts at intimidation from whites when I showed interest or revealed respect for black people and their activities and culture in our city. And I had also, since my first racial awakenings, longed for effective techniques to elude the embarrassment and dangers of white measures designed to coerce non-compliant whites. Finding these means had never been easy for me.

However, on this day and in this place, I was better prepared for I had just recently met Ted Allen.[1] Ted's framing of the problem offered to me an entirely new premise about "being white." He argued that white identity is an invention. In short, I did not have to be white and neither did I have to converse in the language of race used by those who like to call themselves white! This was an exhilarating and heartening discov-

1. Ted Allen is a Brooklyn resident and contributing editor of Race Traitor. *His seminal articles were instrumental in the development of the views that inform this journal. The first volume,* Racial Oppression and Social Control, *of his two-volume study,* The Invention of the White Race, *will be published in 1994 by Verso Press; we hope to review it in our next issue.*

ery. It liberated not only my thinking about the prospects for race relations but it also freed my tongue from the racial script so-called whites are expected to employ in their daily lives.

The cashier continued her instructions about reading materials which are fit for white consumption--"And besides, the news in it is old," she said. I looked swiftly about the shop as I thought about how to respond. There were now two black customers who were so close to us that there was no doubt that they had heard the cashier's words, just as they had overheard similar white shibboleth so many times before in their lives.

Seeing that I had an audience, I turned back to the cashier, who by now was informing me where to obtain the "white newspaper." I let her finish speaking, and then I said in a loud, crisp voice, "You must think I'm white."

She was startled. But within seconds she came to realize that these simple words represented a profound act of racial sedition. I had betrayed her precious "white race". At this moment her eyes wandered beyond me to see, as I could also see, the two black patrons who were apparently amused because their faces had broken into a grin. Upon being discovered, they both sought to cover their faces with their hands. The cashier became furious. But she was clearly at a loss of what to do with this Judas.

For a split moment I felt very sorry for her humiliation and even sensed a momentary pang of guilt for unfair tactics in besting her. But then I was reminded of all those perhaps thousands of instances in my lifetime in which white people had excused or tried to explain away racist behavior in my presence even if they in some way objected to it. The white supremacy I had been taught, of course, not only entailed permission and even encouragement for acts of racial animosity and brutality toward black victims, but more importantly it also included an elaborate catechism of apologetics in which justification and diversionary explanations for white malice could be derived even for those whites who claimed not to approve of such behavior. Needless to say, this is what has always held white solidarity against racial justice in place.

The thought then seized me--liberation from racism involves rejection of the catechism of apologetics every bit as much as ceasing to engage actively in racist acts, thoughts, and words. So a clean and refreshing feeling crept over me as I thought further about this and then the internal struggle, which because of my remark, the cashier must now confront.

I pushed the quarter across the counter toward her, picked up my copy of The Richmond *Afro-American*, and strolled out of the shop. I sensed the eyes of all three of those inside following my exit, all for their own reasons.

Strolling down Broad Street scanning the front page, I recall thinkinghey, here is a story you can't read in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* or *News Leader.*

PANIC, RAGE AND REASON

BY JOHN GARVEY

Long Island is probably best known to many people across the United States as the place where Howard Stern, the early-morning radio talk show personality and now best-selling author, was raised. If they listen to his show or read the book, they may conclude that Long Island is a place that, for whatever reasons, produces people able to say something bad about everybody and to do it with great vulgarity. But that is hardly the whole story. The recent assault (early December, 1993) on a commuter train of the Long Island Rail Road demands that we have more than a superficial acquaintance with "the Island."

As most readers probably know, Colin Ferguson, a thirty-five year old black man, has been charged in the murder of six individuals and the injuring of nineteen more. Mr. Ferguson, according to the terrified surviving eyewitnesses, rather emotionlessly moved through a car on the evening commuter train from New York City and fired off approximately thirty rounds from a nine millimeter automatic weapon--beginning pretty much as soon as the train passed the city line. In the hours and days following the shootings, anyone and everyone had something to say about the accused shooter or his victims. Some of the victims' stories were especially hard to be unaffected by--one father lay dead, while his only son lay close to death, certainly paralyzed, in a nearby hospital.

I imagine that I know a lot of people like that man and his son and I think I know something of the terrible ache that people experience when those they love are ripped from life too soon. Indeed, I even know someone who was in the car and, although he was not injured, he obviously remains shaken up. While I might understand human pain, I don't pretend to understand the terror that the passengers felt as the gunman did his work.

But at the same time, I worry that too many of us are missing something rather important in the story of the assault. One cluster of analyses has been preoccupied with trying to understand how Mr. Ferguson could have done it. We have read of his relatively privileged childhood on the island of Jamaica; we have learned of his troubled marriage; we have been told that many saw him as someone prepared to see a slight when

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none was intended. It is probably obvious that Mr. Ferguson was deeply troubled. But, without intending to excuse what his troubles led him to, I'd like to suggest that his troubles need to be examined.

Apparently, Mr. Ferguson came to the United States in 1982. Although he was relatively well-educated, he was not able to secure well-paying employment. And he apparently came quickly to see that life for a black man in New York City was a bit of a set-up. Among the notes explaining his actions found in his clothing after he was wrestled to the ground by three of his potential victims was the following (in the version printed by The *New York Times*) :

> The sloppy running of the #2 train it is racism by Caucasians and Uncle Tom Negroes
> Also
> The false allegations against me by the filthy Caucasian racist female on the #1 line P. to

The jottings could easily be written off as the words of a madman. But the Times also printed excerpts from a letter that Mr. Ferguson had mailed to the police commissioner in December of 1992 and that letter suggests that the madness may have been nourished by the realities of life in New York City. Apparently, Mr. Ferguson had been arrested in February of 1992 as the result of a complaint by a woman passenger on the #1 train, a subway line that runs up and down the west side of Manhattan and the Bronx. He believed that the arrest had been a wrongful one and he pursued legal remedies. The letter was worded as if it had been written by a group of sympathetic individuals but the name on the return address was Mr. Ferguson's and it is almost certain that he wrote it. The letter reads as follows:

> Please be advised that Mr. Colin Ferguson has contacted us, his close friends in the "black" professional community, to advise and assist him regarding his numerous requests for the immediate return of all documents, records, photographs, fingerprints, and negatives, related to his racist and false arrest of Feb. 17, 1992. This, of course, constituted the first arrest of Mr. Ferguson's life.
>
> A review of the documents in our possession revealed the racism and corruption within your agency, as you attempt to deny Mr. Ferguson the fundamental guarantees provided for under our system. ...
>
> The above mentioned arrest was particularly viscous (sic)

and racist for the following reasons:

1) Mr. Ferguson had been sitting in the same well defined seat on the #1 train for eight (8) or more stops before his racist caucasian accuser and her racist caucasian female friend boarded the train demanding that Mr. Ferguson move over.

2) The accuser was not denied a seat since she did sit down. She knew that the row of seats on that train does not accommodate its capacity comfortably, especially in the winter when commuters overdress.

3) The two racist caucasian police officers pushed Mr. Ferguson to the platform violently where he sustained shock and bruises.

4) A caucasian man with a pitbull on the subway platform impersonating a police officer had his dog jump on Mr. Ferguson's chest. He was allowed to go free although thirty or more commuters demanded that he be arrested.

5) The twelve (12) caucasian police officers refused to take the names of the fifteen (15) or so witnesses who came forward for Mr. Ferguson.

6) The N.Y.C. Transit Police has consistently engaged in a racist campaign of targeting "blacks" using the subway system in an effort to improve arrest statistics within the subway, which is then publicized with the hope that more caucasians will utilize the subway system.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the accounts offered by the woman passenger and the police involved differ substantially from what Mr. Ferguson described and it is not likely that the discrepancies could be resolved. However, most New York subway riders will confirm that the seats on the cars used on the #1 train are too small for most adult passengers. I would not attempt to argue that Mr. Ferguson's account is necessarily the more accurate one. I would argue that the scenes his letter describes could have been taken from the pages of the lives of all too many of the city's young black men.

In New York City, those young men live in a twilight zone of fear and uncertainty. Every public act of foolishness, impatience, or hostility can easily result in real trouble--most often with the police. While the police have the discretion to do otherwise, they often respond with insults, threats, beatings, and arrests--which is, quite obviously, what they did with Mr. Ferguson in February of 1992.

For the past twenty years, young black men have been treated as if

their complaints were the products of over-sensitive personalities. Perhaps some of those young men have been able to find some solace in the stories told by their friends that they had experienced the same treatment. But the larger social world has allowed for little verification of their hunches that they were being singled out. (Occasionally, of course, there appear confirmations, in research studies or the news media far removed from the scenes of their lives, that what they suspect is indeed all too true. Recent examples include the acquittal of a black *Newsday* reporter on charges of fare evasion on the subway; the reporter rested his case on the argument that the transit police routinely harassed young black men.)

This is not, lest you think otherwise, a situation unique to New York. As I wrote this essay, I came across an article in The *New York Times* which reported that one out of every three young black men in the city of Denver is considered by the police as a probable gang member--based on hard evidence such as preferred clothing styles.

But my story is not really about what those young black men think and feel. My story is about what the commuters think and feel. Several days after the event, the *Times* did an analysis of the responses of Long Island residents. Although some of those interviewed for the article express surprise or shock at the event, while others insist they are not surprised, the overall point is that this is not supposed to happen in Long Island. Quite obviously, the same story couldn't be written about Brownsville, Mott Haven, South Jamaica, or many neighborhoods in the city where seeing people die before their time has become almost a routine occurrence. No, the whole point of Long Island is that it's not supposed to be like the city--and, in this case, the city means a place where black people live and die. One Long Island political-office holder was quoted as saying, "It shook up a lot of people out here. I think that this gunman pierced this almost invisible barrier that we all felt between ourselves and *insanity*. What makes it even more frightening to us is that the gunman was delivered to us by *our own railroad.*" (Emphasis added.)

In any case, the event and the aftermath reminded me of an article on white panic in New York that I have been trying to write for this issue of *Race Traitor* but, for a number of reasons, have not quite been able to get to. Some readers will recall that, in the days following the acquittal of the police officers in Simi Valley, rebellions occurred in a number of major cities. But in New York nothing quite that dramatic occurred, and the mayor, David Dinkins, was applauded by all for having kept the peace.

But what did happen in New York in April of 1992 was a panic. I was at work that day and was supposed to leave early to get to Brooklyn

in time to coach a Little League practice. I forget most of the details, but I was told in early afternoon that all hell was breaking out in the city and that various groups of people were marauding around and threatening people. I was told that Penn Station had been attacked and was closed. I was more than an hour from home and I had to try and figure out if we should call a dozen kids and tell them to stay home. No one really seemed to know anything.

It turned out that very little had happened. There had been a march and marchers had expressed their anger at the events on the west coast by breaking some store windows. That was about it. Nonetheless, offices and stores closed all over town; people were sent home early and many were convinced that they were in great danger. I think perhaps that the reason why so many were so willing to be convinced is that, deep in their hearts, they know that there is reason for the rage that might have taken to the streets. With that knowledge, they live in a state of near panic most of the time. You can hear it quite clearly in the voices of the callers to the most outrageous of the radio talk shows.

Ironies multiply. Penn Station is the terminal of the Long Island Rail Road --"our" railroad --and if that was attacked, what were "we" to do? The Long Island Rail Road actually has two major routes within the city--one from Penn Station, the other from Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. The Brooklyn route goes along Atlantic Avenue all the way to Jamaica, the major junction of the two routes. The Jamaica station is located in one of the largest black communities of Queens and virtually all of the neighborhoods adjoining the train tracks in Brooklyn are populated by black people. For the residents of these neighborhoods, the elevated tracks are an imposing reminder of the people who get to travel away from the misery of Brooklyn's streets. For those on the train, the scenes from the window are reminders of all that they're not forced to live with.

The people on the trains are not stick figures; they need not be caricatured. They include men who work long hours to allow their kids to ride bikes down streets without traffic; they include women who do the same. They include Little League coaches and people who've worked too long at jobs where no one appreciates them. They include people who go home at night to take care of elderly relatives. (Those same relatives might very well be taken care of during the day by black home healthcare workers who travel out from the city to find work.) At the same time, the people on the trains are the beneficiaries of a complex social system which makes their share of life's difficulties not quite as large nor quite as difficult to manage as the share parcelled out to those on the streets they pass by.

People, being what people are (meaning, for most of us most of the time, that we're not able to tell very well if our good or bad fortune has

much to do with our own behavior), think about the apparent discrepancies and conclude that they must be due to something in their nature. And nothing, perhaps other than gender, explains nature better than race. Since race comes more or less equally divided between the genders, and since the better lives on the suburban divide are distributed without too much regard to gender, race becomes paramount.

And people talk, sort of. They don't really talk. Instead, they trade attitudes. These attitudes can get pretty vulgar at times. Last year, I went to a wake for an old friend of my mother. She happened also to be the mother of someone I had attended elementary and high school with, who now lives, with his wife and two kids, in Connecticut--another suburban retreat for ex-New Yorkers. During one of those somewhat hushed conversations that take place in funeral parlors, he told me that, just the day before, he had travelled to the funeral parlor (located in the neighborhood that he and I grew up in and that his and my parents continued to live in) by a route that took him through exactly the neighborhoods that the Long Island Railroad's Brooklyn tracks pass through. He explained that he wanted to give his kids a chance to see "Showtime"--meaning the degradation of burned out houses, empty lots, police sirens screeching, men standing on corners, and so forth. I didn't pursue the topic so I don't know for sure if he intended the "show" to teach his kids how lucky they were or how depraved the black residents of Brooklyn were. It doesn't much matter since the point was that people were living in two different worlds.

In mid-December, a study out of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education reported that New York State had the most segregated schools of any state in the country and that neither New Jersey nor Connecticut was much better. The Commissioner of the State Education Department in New York State, Thomas Sobol, responded that the state indeed did effectively have two different school systems--one urban, impoverished and black and the other, suburban, well endowed and white. He renewed his previous commitment to equalize the two. It will not happen so long as the whites on the trains want to keep their distance from the blacks on the streets.

There are now quite a few black folks who live in the towns and villages of Long Island. But the part of the Island that lies outside the boundaries of the city of New York has, for at least the past two generations, been synonymous with white flight. Many white folks have been prepared to rather readily forsake their families' neighborhoods in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens and to face hours-long commutes on the roads or railroads and to pay scandalously high real estate taxes--all to avoid living in close proximity to blacks. At the same time, the fortunes of almost all those who reside in the Island's suburbs are tied to the economy of the city.

Numerous issues of the metropolitan area's political life reflect the

uneasy balance. For example, many members of New York City's police force live in the suburban counties of Nassau and Suffolk on Long Island and, with predictable regularity after some rather blatant example of police brutality, one newspaper columnist or another argues that they should be required to live within the city lines while, with equally predictable regularity, another responds that those who qualify to be on the force should not be subjected to unconstitutional restrictions as to place of residence. This too will not change so long as the whites on the trains want to keep their distance from the blacks on the streets.

Not all whites have always been so determined to be apart from blacks. One of the most striking examples of early fraternization occurred during what has been called the "New York Conspiracy" in 1741. That conspiracy resulted in: "Thirteen black men burned to death at the stake. Seventeen black men hanged. Two white men and two white women also hanged." The burnings and hangings were punishments for the alleged participation of those convicted for setting fires to many of the city's buildings in the late winter and early spring of that year.

In the mid-eighteenth century, New York City was a slave town. Then, as now, times were hard and many of the city's residents, white and black, were being pushed close to the edge of survival. Each day, small battles were fought over wealth and power. Thefts were common as people tried to get something to eat and arguments over freedom of movement were frequent. The preeminent historian of the 1741 conspiracy, Thomas Davis, wrote that, "Instead of being gratefully obedient as the slaveholders hoped, blacks seethed with resentment." They sought out and found whites who were willing to lend them a sympathetic ear and a hand. Among those whites were Irish soldiers and tavern keepers. The attitude of many of the black slaves was typified in the words of a man named Sandy: "God damn all the white people. If I had it in my power, I'd burn them all." The attitude of their white allies was expressed by Private Edward Murphy: "Damn me if I won't lend a hand to the fires as soon as anybody."

Davis concludes that, although the authorities saw grand conspiracies where none existed, many of the accused had indeed lent a hand to the setting of the fires and that the collaboration between whites and blacks was what drove the authorities mad. A series of trials responded to the panic of most of the city's white residents, who feared that the whole town would burn down. The trials were intended to do more than convict the guilty.

Daniel Horsmanden, one of the principal architects of the prosecution, wrote that he hoped:

> The people in general might be persuaded of the necessity

> there is for everyone who has negroes to keep a very watchful eye over them and not indulge them with too great liberties which we find they make use of to the worst purposes, caballing and confederating together in mischief in great numbers when they may. . . The principal inducement, therefore, to this undertaking [meaning the trials] was the public benefit; that those who have property in slaves might have a lasting memento concerning the nature of them; that they may be thence warned to keep a constant guard over them; since what they have done, they may one time or other act over again, especially if there should in future times appear such monsters in nature, as the Hughsons, Ury the priest, and such like who dare be so wicked as to attempt the seducing [of] them to such execrable purposes.

Horsmanden and his allies apparently were convinced that the revolt of the fires had been led by a white person since they believed that "blacks were incapable of serious thinking and planning." That they thought so is probably not too surprising. But, they also thought that not even "the scum and dregs" of the white population "would on their own stoop so low as to reject the society's basic values by making common cause with blacks." Thus, they looked for a leader who was "an outsider, or someone bewitched or thoroughly corrupted by foreign ideas." This led them to "Ury the priest." There is debate about Ury's actual role but the point remains that while the black slaves were to be more closely watched, the whites were to be warned as well.

In the two hundred and more years since the events of 1741, New York has seen precious few whites who were prepared to be "monsters of nature" and to "reject the society's basic values." Until we see more of them, the oppression that fueled the rage of Colin Ferguson will be the lot of those who are passed by the people on the trains.

It seems that the lessons taught by the prosecutors of 1741 has been learned all too well by whites. But lessons can be unlearned. Part of that unlearning will necessarily involve a new language of social responsibility where we can begin to understand that responsibility for oppression does not depend on an intention to cause oppression. The people on the Long Island Rail Road, for the most part, did not intend to oppress anyone but they, and we all, are often prepared to look away from the facts of oppression as we ride home--on the subway or on the railroad. It's high time to look hard at the realities again.

If the panic is not challenged with a new kind of reason, the blinds of whiteness will obscure what we need to see most clearly.

OUT OF WHITENESS

BY CHRISTOPHER DAY

"Faggot" he spit. "Are you a faggot?" and he put his hand on my chest and pushed me back a couple steps. It was like a bad movie. I was with my best friend Marc and we were surrounded by about eight beefy jocks in an alley who wanted to know if I or we were faggots. Marc wasn't and said so. I was and was scared to death. "Are you a faggot?" the shortest one repeated. "Try me and find out" was the most evasive answer I could summon up, suggesting that maybe both of us were. To save my dignity it was the best answer I could give. To save my skin, it wasn't. The short jock's face went red, and I seized on the moment of shock to run like hell. Marc ran with me. They chased us about half a block and threw rocks. We escaped.

Every day in alleys, on schoolyards, outside bars, hundreds or thousands of queer women and men have an experience like this. Sometimes it ends with a dignity crushing lie: "No, I'm not." Often it ends with a fist in the face, a boot in the gut, a knife stuck somewhere. And sometimes it ends with a corpse. Almost never is it reported to the police for reasons that should be obvious. Only in the handful of cities with strong queer communities are some of the bodies not buried in a closet as well as a casket. Heterosexuality, like whiteness, is enforced with extreme brutality.

It is difficult for me to separate in my mind my queerness from my race treachery. I am a bisexual man. When I use the term queer I am referring to the full range of individual sexualities that include the refusal of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory masculine and feminine gender roles --lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, transsexuals, and transvestites.

I want to make several points here. First, that sexual identities are socially constructed, and that heterosexuality and whiteness fulfill similar functions in the enforcement of authoritarian social relations. Second, that the community of race traitors will naturally draw disproportionately from those people who have already defined themselves as traitors to the way this society seeks to shape their identity, a significant proportion of whom are queer. Finally, that there is a need to more fully elaborate the politics of race treason and to begin talking about class and gender treason.

Race treachery ultimately implies a revolutionary politics that reaches well beyond questions of race. In much the same way that the aboli-

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tionist movement necessarily set in motion a civil war, the birth of the women's liberation movement, a flowering of distinctly American music and literature, and during Reconstruction the first American experiences of workers power, I believe that the effort to abolish whiteness can send similar shockwaves through the whole structure of this authoritarian society.

TALKING TREASON

White supremacy plays a unique role in US society. In many respects I believe that it occupies a position of strategic centrality for those of us who wish to see this system come crashing down. The grip that whiteness has on the consciousness of the majority of people in this society is an immediate and persistent obstacle to building any serious movement for radical change in this country. I believe that it is possible for white people to break with whiteness and join the rest of humanity in the fight for a better world. But I don't believe there is any simple formula, any appeal to immediate material interests, any slogan that can bring this about. It is not a simple matter of doing the right thing, because whiteness obscures in our minds what the right thing is. What is needed is treason. To be a traitor to whiteness starts with an honest acknowledgement of how whiteness has deeply shaped me. To bring down white supremacy will involve a collective struggle. But to bring together a community or group of people who can launch that attack involves an existential struggle, a determination to abandon what is a deep part of ourselves and to throw ourselves into what? Loyalty to humanity is weak broth these days, but it is precisely what is needed to sustain us.

If white supremacy has played a unique role in US society that is not to suggest that other forms of authoritarian social relations are subordinate to it. The idea of race treason begs the question of other kinds of treason. It begs this question in two ways. First there is the simple matter of carrying the idea to its logical extremes, to see where it goes. Secondly there is the concrete question of where to find treasonous souls. From a very early age I have known that this society was deeply rotten. Coming to the point of identifying myself as a race traitor helped me clarify my own history, helped me to see the thread that has run through my life as one of trying to find other people willing to join me in some act of treason to this system or another. If whiteness has a peculiar grip on the minds of many people in the US, the relations between men and women and the various hypocritical sexual moralities that prevail in almost every corner of the planet are no less deranged. And it is on this terrain of sexuality that I think we can find probably the richest practice of treachery to the existing order. Looking back and trying to untangle the way in which I came to despise not just this society but the way that

it had insinuated itself into my self-identity it is consistently my resistance to having the truth of my sexuality crushed that has kept my edge sharp.

It is perhaps inevitable in a misogynistic and heterosexist society that a community of race traitors will to some extent reproduce the prevailing power relations of gender and sexuality. What is not yet determined is how we will respond to this problem. In order to succeed, and simply because it is right, the community of race traitors must be a place where women are able to speak and be heard and where queer people can be out and proud. Of course this is easier said than done. The most effective way to make this happen is to make clear the way that whiteness, heterosexuality, and traditional gender categories are interdependent, and the way that a small tear in the fabric of one can turn into an unpatchable rip in the whole cloth of oppressive and authoritarian social relations.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUAL IDENTITIES

An elementary principle of race treason is that whiteness is a social construction and not a biological fact. This understanding at least gains some support from even the most lukewarm liberal variety of anti-racism. But the pseudoscientific categories of "race" retain their scientific veneer in the minds of most people and it was not so long ago that they went virtually unchallenged. We need to be equally as critical of the categories of gender and sexuality that are represented to us still as scientific facts. We need to understand how these categories have arisen out of particular historical processes and how they serve to perpetuate systems of oppression and exploitation.

People have almost certainly been having sex with people of the same biological sex as long as there have been people. The pseudoscientific categories of homo-and heterosexuality, however, are creations of the modern world that arose in response to the ideological needs of capitalism as it attempted to impose the repressive sexual regime of the European bourgeois family on the rest of humanity. This is not to say that the suppression of queer sexuality is a historically recent event, but rather that the world of sexual relations we face today is one that has been fundamentally shaped by capitalism. The attitudes of pre-capitalist cultures to queer sexuality were hardly monolithic. Clearly many contemporary attitudes towards sexuality have ancient roots and complex pre-capitalist histories, but for my purposes I will only look at how contemporary categories of sexuality were shaped by the rise of capitalism, and how they are reproduced under capitalism.

Whiteness arose as a response to the needs of capitalism, as an emerging world system, for a loyal mass base to maintain and defend the

exploitation of far flung colonies in general, and slavery in particular. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, Maria Mies investigates how the process of colonizing Africa, Asia and the Americas was accompanied by a brutal war on women that began with the European witch hunts, included the sexual terrorization of African women in the slave trade and the imposition of the bourgeois family structure on women. Mies argues that capitalism has consistently depended on the super-exploitation of, and consequent repression of, those outside the direct relationship between the capitalist and the wage-worker: women, slaves, and colonial subjects. Heterosexuality, like whiteness, arose to fulfill the repressive needs of this system.

Heterosexuality is much more than sex between people of "opposite" biological sexes. It is the exclusive definition of that activity as normal and healthy sexuality. A heterosexual is not someone who has sex with people of the opposite sex, but rather someone who does not have sex with people of the same sex. The very idea of "heterosexuality" arose as part of the late-19th century process of defining "homosexuality" as a medical, and later as a psychological, disorder. Heterosexuality is a category that was created for the purpose of suppressing homosexuality. The suppression of homosexuality fulfilled three important functions for capitalism:

1. As part of an overall imposition of sexual repression the suppression of homosexuality helped impose labor discipline on the recently proletarianized peasantry of the emerging capitalist powers.

2. The suppression of homosexuality also aided in the imposition of the bourgeois family structure on proletarian women and men, ensuring the contribution of women's unwaged "reproductive" labor to the process of capital accumulation.

3. The suppression of homosexuality helps establish a foundation for male solidarity and collective violence that has been a crucial weapon of enforcement in the maintenance of white supremacy, male supremacy and capitalism.

What I would like to propose is that the successful imposition of the system of white supremacy depended on the sexual terrorization of African women and the imposition of a regime of sexual repression on white women. White supremacy depended on two main weapons of male supremacy: rape and sexual repression. In turn the success of these two tactics depended on a culture of male solidarity that was necessarily homophobic. The hypocritical sexual morality that allowed and encouraged white men to rape Black women while defending the "honor" of white women could not sustain the challenge posed by any open breach of the rules of male solidarity. The first of these rules, of course, is the suppression of any open expression of homoerotic feeling between men.

The crucial term here is "open." The suppression of homosexuality is not primarily about eliminating same-sex sexual activity, though that is no doubt the intention of its prosecutors. It is primarily about driving it underground. If you want to be "one of the guys," if you want to be a full member of the community of men, it can be okay to want to suck cock, it can even be okay to do it, but it can never be acknowledged. The consequent self-loathing that comes from living this lie often only turns the man in question into a more brutal enforcer of the whole authoritarian order.

In *From Sundown to Sunup: the Making of the Black Community*, George P. Rawick argues that "Racism came out of the context of (the) revolutionary rechanneling of human personality that was required by the new social, political, and economic order of modern capitalism." (p. 132) Rawick describes the ways in which the discipline of wage labor depended on the imposition of a puritanical regime of sexual repression.

If the imposition of wage labor demanded the suppression of queer sexuality, the maintenance of white male solidarity in the American South amplified that demand. The bourgeois and patriarchal family structured around the heterosexual couple was a cornerstone in the construction of capitalist relations. It ensured the reproduction of labor power through the unwaged work of the wife, it separated the worker from the larger community of the village and extended family, and compelled the husband to show up promptly for work on Monday if he didn't want his children to starve. Even if he was not yet an industrial worker himself, the white man in the American South was subject to this same reorganization of his life. Heaped on top of this demand that he repress himself sexually in conformity with the demands of the bourgeois family was the expectation that he participate in the enforcement of the system of slavery and white supremacy. In *Ain't I a Woman, Black Women and Feminism*, bell hooks describes the significant role that rape played in the dehumanization of Africans under slavery. Describing the general process of terrorizing enslaved Africans, hooks argues that "African females received the brunt of this mass brutalization and terrorization not only because they could be victimized via their sexuality but also because they were more likely to work intimately with the white family than the black male." (pp. 19-20)

Rape was not an incidental feature of the slave system, it was central to its functioning. But, of course this could never be publicly acknowledged, because that would undermine the functioning of the bourgeois patriarchal family. Repressed in one area of his life, the white man was given full freedom to vent his violent frustrations on African women. In order to prevent this system from spinning hopelessly out of control it

was necessary for white men to establish a system of solidarity in their sexual crimes against women. The systematic rape of slave women transforms sex into an unquestionable act of domination. For a white man to express sexual desire for another white man is to threaten to either use the weapon of domination within the circle of white men or, more subversively, to refuse to participate in the use of sexuality for domination. Either way, the expression of homoerotic desire becomes an act of treachery against the rules of white male solidarity that maintain the racial, sexual and economic order.

And it still is today. It was no accident that the rise of the civil rights movement coincided with the emergence of rock'n'roll and the birth of a radical counter-culture among white youth. The civil rights movement created a breach into which everybody who felt crushed by the authoritarian structure of American society could step. The civil rights movement challenged whiteness from without and set in motion forces that would eventually challenge it from within. Rock'n'roll and the Gay liberation movement of the 1970s were both expressions of defiance against "white" values, in particular white notions of sexuality that drew in large numbers of white participants. Both were also deeply indebted to the Black community and the Black liberation movement for showing the way in challenging those values. The overlap of whiteness and heterosexuality is probably best illustrated by the multiple meanings of the word "straight" within various counter-cultures, referring both to those who do not embrace Black popular culture and those who obey the rules of heterosexuality.

THE CHALLENGE OF QUEER LIBERATION

The queer liberation movement that burst forth with the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 changed the terms under which sexual identity was to be constructed in this society. With the exception of a few earlier and more tentative efforts, the categories of sexuality had up to that moment been defined by the system. The queer liberation movement was first of all an assertion of our humanity, of our agency, of our intent to define ourselves. The process of self-definition is an ongoing one, but it is one that is reaching into every small town, every high school, every institution of this society and shaking it up.

There is nothing about having sex with or being in love with someone of the same sex that is automatically radical or subversive. But to proclaim it proudly, to defy the powers that have attempted to define you as evil or sick, to openly refuse to conform to the standards of being a man or a woman in a society that depends on that conformity is profoundly subversive.

The past decade has seen a dramatic shift in popular attitudes towards queer sexuality. For a variety of reasons, the AIDS epidemic being perhaps the most significant, millions of queer people have come out to friends, family members, co-workers and others. The simple act of coming out of the closet multiplied a million times is slowly eroding the assumption of straightness. This erosion is also creating huge areas of sexual ambiguity that are shaking up the gay and lesbian institutions that have been built up since Stonewall. Where previously the world of sexuality seemed neatly divided between the gay and the straight, now bisexuals, transsexuals and transvestites are asserting their queerness. This has been very threatening for lesbians and gay men who have constructed their self-identity around the duality of homo-and heterosexualities. There is also deep division within the queer community (or to be more precise, queer communities) between those who are seeking the acceptance of straight society, and those who despise straight society and want to see it destroyed. (These contradictions are perhaps most clearly reflected in the language we use: the embrace of "Queer" as a term that is both inclusive of a broad range of sexualities and defiant of assimilation into straight culture has been highly contested.)

RACE TREASON AND QUEER LIBERATION

It has been argued that it will only take a minority of white people to destroy whiteness because all that is necessary is to cast into doubt that a person who is perceived as white can be counted on to act white. No stronger case can be made for this idea than the experience of the queer liberation movement over the past few years. It has become increasingly difficult in many circles for people to presume that everybody around them is straight, or willing to pretend to be. For those of us who see the revolutionary potential of race treason there are three important things to consider about queer liberation. The first is how the struggle to redefine or destroy the categories of sexuality can inform our efforts to destroy the categories of race (what, for example, might the abolition of whiteness mean for the idea of Blackness?). The second is to understand how the struggle over sexuality that is taking place right now all over the country is shaping much of the terrain on which an attempt to challenge the categories of race in general, and whiteness in particular, will take place. The obstacles that are thrown in the way of that struggle will have to be overcome by us. Finally we need to understand how queer liberation by challenging the church, the family, and male supremacy, is unraveling the fabric of lies and hypocrisy of which whiteness is just one part.

REVIEW:
WHITE WOMEN, RACE MATTERS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS BY RUTH FRANKENBERG, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 1993

BY MARYON GRAY

This book grew out of the author's frustration with the inadequacy of the white feminist movement's response to charges of racism in the early 1980s. Frankenberg combines socialist feminist political theory with interviews with thirty women to produce an analysis in an academic style of the significance of race privilege to white women's views of race. I found the combination of academic research, political analysis and the breadth of the subject matter too ambitious to produce a successful book in only 250 pages. Nevertheless, the book makes a valuable contribution to understanding the effect of race and racism in white women's lives.

Frankenberg calls her project a study of white women and racism, emphasizing that racism shapes white women's lives as well as the lives of people of color. Thus for white women antiracist work is not something to be done as an act of compassion for the "other", but a necessary part of freeing ourselves.

Throughout the book the author talks of "whiteness". As she says, "it may be more difficult for white people to say 'Whiteness has nothing to do with me--I'm not white' than to say 'Race has nothing to do with me--I'm not racist.' To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism."

Frankenberg also uses "white" and "whiteness" to put a name to a world view and a set of conditions of life which are usually put forward not as "white" but as "the norm". As she says, "among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility." She states clearly that race is a social construction, a category which is linked to relations of power and processes of struggle and one whose meaning changes over time. Nevertheless, race is "real" in the sense that it has effects in the world and on individual's lives.

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Frankenberg combines this theoretical framework with excerpts from interviews with thirty white women. She does not claim these women are a cross section of white women, but they are diverse in age, class, region of origin, sexual preference, family situation, and political orientation, although all lived in northern California when interviewed. Throughout the book she shows how their differences mediate the meaning of whiteness in their lives.

The book begins with descriptions by five white women of the places they grew up and Frankenberg's analysis of the social geography of race--how physical space was inhabited and who inhabited it and what children were taught, explicitly or by example, to think of the variously "raced" people in their environment. This is the only chapter which focuses on the material relations of white skin privilege. The main focus of the book is on the discourse, the ways of speaking and thinking which frame how white women view questions of race. Frankenberg is careful to try to show how this discourse, these ways of speaking and thinking, grew out of and were a deliberate part of Western European colonialism. I congratulate her for including this history, since it is still so little known. However in my opinion her history was biased in that it emphasized the activity of the Western European colonialists without noting activity by Native Americans, Africans, Asians and others against whom the colonial discourse was directed. This reinforces the mistaken idea that Western Europeans are the prime actors in modern history. Frankenberg also fails to discuss the advantages and disadvantages to whites of the maintenance of this racist discourse today.

The book contains two chapters on "Race, Sex & Intimacy." The first focuses on the societal prohibition against interracial primary relationships and the effect of the discourse against these relationships on all women's lives. Some examples of the perpetuation of racist discourse were:

> Chris early learned the stereotype of the African American man as "rapist."
>
> Evelyn described a family friend as having children "sired" by a Black man, clearly reducing the man to an animal.

Consistent with her focus on a white world view, Frankenberg does not discuss the reasons why people of color may be opposed to interracial primary relationships. A serious omission in this chapter was in Frankenberg's attempt to discuss the construction of masculinity and femininity along racial lines without mentioning women of color, except

to point out the history of Black women being raped by white men.

The next chapter focuses on the stories of women in primary relationships with partners or children of color. The stories run a spectrum beginning with Frieda, whose mother refused to attend her wedding to an African American man but after making this symbolic gesture welcomed Frieda and her husband to visit. In contrast Louise was raised in a working class, mixed Chicano and white neighborhood and many women in her family partnered with Chicanos.

The consistent theme of the interviewees concerning interracial relationships was the great disadvantage to children of being "mixed". As Frankenberg points out, this raises the idea of race purity and of race being a genetically fixed boundary. Those who did not want to appear racist were careful to phrase this disadvantage in terms of "cultural differences": the children wouldn't know to what culture they belonged. I noted that these were the same comments made fifty years ago about relationships between, for example, Italian Americans and Polish Americans, confirming the historical nature of these boundaries.

In contrast the stories of the women who parented "mixed race" children did not make light of the difficulties that these children faced, but made it clear that these were social difficulties, not inherent ones. I found the comments by the interviewees in this chapter to be Frankenberg's clearest example of how racist discourse and the seemingly normative nature of something which is socially determined creep unconsciously into a person's world view.

The chapter titled "Thinking Through Race" focuses explicitly on modes of thinking about race. Frankenberg delineates three modes of thinking about race:

1. "Essentialist Racism": The worldview developed to make colonialism, slavery and genocide possible. This can be crudely paraphrased as "Others are different from whites and whites are better."
2. "Color Evasive and Power Evasive" worldview: Avoids thinking and acting on the reality of white skin privilege and racial domination by focusing on the notion that "we are all the same under the skin". Sees being "color blind" as a positive attribute.
3. "Race cognizant" worldview: Incorporates the awareness of race differences because of structural and institutional inequality and also celebrates the value of subordinated cultures.

Two groups of the women interviewed put forth a "color-blind" worldview: Women who grew up in the 1930s and '40s articulated this view as a reaction to the essentialist racism with which they were raised.

However, it was striking that younger women who grew up in the 1970s and '80s also articulated this view. For many of these women, to see racial difference was to be prejudiced. This blindness results in blindness to the structures of power and domination which perpetuate racial difference and white skin privilege. At worst it leads to white backlash against affirmative action because if everyone is the same under the skin, there is no need to treat people differently because of their skin color.

Women who had a more race cognizant worldview also fell into two groups: those focused on their own racism and possible complicity with the most blatant historical racism (a "no win" approach) and those who focused on changing society (a much more complex but productive approach).

The book's final chapter focuses on white women's descriptions of their culture. Noting that white women often describe themselves as cultureless, Frankenberg makes two important points which are well illustrated by the interviews.

First, this apparent cultural void comes partly from a mistaken view of culture which sees it as something apart from everyday material life. More importantly, the idea that there is no white culture comes from the unconscious view of white culture not as white culture but as the unspoken norm. In a simple example, women referred to "Mexican" music versus "regular" music, regular meaning "white." One of the interviewees succinctly described the result of this view saying, "Well what does white mean? One thing is, it's taken for granted. . .[To be white means to] have some sort of advantage or privilege, even if it's something as simple as not having a definition." This normative position of white Western culture allows other cultures to be more clearly defined. They can be defined precisely because they are outside the norm.

In the Epilogue, Frankenberg seeks to pull from what has gone before a theory for social change. I'd like to see this epilogue transformed from a "tailer" to an academic research project to an article or pamphlet. As a short epilogue it exists mostly as sterile theory without many examples from the interviews which could have made it real.

Frankenberg notes that race shapes white women's lives both through the material conditions of their lives and through their conscious and unconscious identity and worldview. Quoting Antonio Gramsci, "The consciousness of what one really is [entails] 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory," Frankberg sees this book as the beginning of an inventory of whiteness as subjective terrain.

Frankenberg sees the potential for change as existing at places of contradiction between materiality and discourse. She states it would be a

mistake to ask which comes first in the process of transformation --the materiality of daily life or the introduction of a different worldview. It can happen either way.

For example, Louise's childhood friendships with Chicanos and Mexicans and her sense of the similarity between their families and her own made it relatively easy for her to dismiss as racist the hostility to Chicanos expressed by her father and some of her white schoolmates.

Conversely, for some of the women interviewed, exposure to new views of the world generated reinterpretation of their own environments. Frankenberg stresses that exposure to these new ideas occurs in a material context, whether it be "local" (as when an individual moves from one place to another) or more "global" (as when a broad social movement generates greater public visibility for new ways of thinking and acting).

For this reader, although I found Frankenberg's political and academic vocabulary daunting, I rate the book a valuable contribution to the white feminist discussion of racism and white skin privilege which has been dominated either by denial or by guilt-ridden personal or collective brow beating.

"I Just Called Myself a Little Foot Soldier..."

An Interview with Activists at University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill

BY PHIL RUBIO

Editors Note: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has long enjoyed a national reputation for scholastic excellence, not to mention championship sports, including the mens' basketball teams (which featured many, like Michael Jordan, who later became NBA stars), and the awesome but less-publicized womens' soccer teams. With 23,000 students it is one of the largest schools in the state. Last year UNC began celebrating its bicentennial as "the first public university in the United States." Student activists noted the irony of the slogan: the beautiful campus was built by slave laborers for slaveowners' sons, and didn't admit its first black student until 1955. Many have used the expression "the plantation" to describe administration attitude and treatment of black workers and students.

The struggle for a Black Cultural Center has gone on for almost 20 years, and attracted national media attention in the fall of 1992 after some black members of the football team mentioned the possbility of boycotting games if Chancellor Paul Hardin would not commit to a BCC (the first time college athletes themselves have called attention to the exploitation of their labor, which creates enormous wealth for universities like UNC.) Like many campuses around the country, UNC has in the past few years seen a growth of student activism: protests against South African apartheid and CIA recruiters, as well as for environmental concerns, support for campus workers' demands, and for more black studies.

The idea for a BCC was first proposed in the mid-1970's by Sonja Haynes Stone, an outspoken professor of Afro-American studies. In 1984 a planning committee submitted a proposal for a permanent site, and in 1987 a director was hired and a small, temporary space provided in the student union, but the administration stalled on the permanent site, which was to house a library, class and meeting rooms, and a performance arts center. When Dr. Stone died suddenly in 1991, black students immediately named the space the Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural

Center, and began a movement for a free-standing BCC in her name.

The coalition was a broad array of student groups, and polls showed most students supported it (although much of the support among white students has since proven thin). Women were especially visible as activists and leaders. While the administration continued stonewalling, students organized "speak-outs" and in September, 1992 began a series of marches, rallies, and sit-ins that attracted national attention and national figures like filmmaker Spike Lee, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and United Farm Worker leader Dolores Huerta.

The struggle at UNC inspired black students around the Triangle area and the nation to organize. Predictably, most media accounts focused on black student social desires (presumably they are not supposed to socialize with each other or "act black"), and pronounced the movement "separatist." Taking the lead from Chancellor Hardin, the media (including the hopelessly patronizing and compromise-prone UNC Daily Tar Heel) deliberately blurred black students' pride and resistance to assimilation, both in social life and organizational structure, by promoting the BCC as a way to educate all students about African-American culture and history.

Meanwhile, the BCC movement was linking up with the mostly black Housekeepers Association, which was fighting plantation-like working conditions and wages--recalling the 1969 student movement in support of the striking cafeteria workers. The Black Student Movement, which got its start during that strike, has also forged links with the black community of Chapel Hill-Carrboro with its Communiversity for children.

Chancellor Hardin finally agreed to recommend to the Board of Trustees that a free-standing BCC be built, which they approved in July. But rather than approve the more centrally-located Wilson Library-Dey Hall site that the BCC Coalition requested, the trustees chose the more distant Coker Woods. Most BCC supporters (including the activists we interviewed) strongly opposed the Coker site, both because of its value as a greenspace as well as the symbolic importance of locating a black cultural center physically in the campus mainstream.

The coalition reluctantly decided to accept the Coker site in November after the trustees refused to reconsider, and a conservative white backlash developed. Led by former UNC trustee John Pope, this backlash seized the opportunity to question the existence of any BCC at all. (The BCC proposal is still subject to approval by the Board of Governors and the state legislature.) In politics as in sports, momentum is everything. Accepting a final site also effectively killed any renewed opportunist campaign to substitute a "multicultural center" for a BCC.

Race Traitor interviewed three student activist leaders: Ruby

Sinreich, a Chapel Hill resident, a 1993 graduate in Environmental Science and Policy with a minor in African-American History, co-chair of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC); Carolynn McDonald, a junior from Surinam majoring in International Studies, pre-law, active in the BSM; and Michelle LeGrand, a senior from Houston, Texas, majoring in Psychology/Biology, chair of the Campus Y, a predominantly white student social action group inspired to political activity by Dr. Stone. All three are on the BCC advisory board. The interview was conducted by Phil Rubio, who lives in Durham, N.C. and is a contributing editor of *Race Traitor*.

RT: How did you first get involved in the BCC movement?

ML: I got involved through the Campus Y. The Campus Y was one of the forerunners of the struggle for a Black Cultural Center. Two years ago they were at an "exec retreat" when news of Sonja's death came, so they moved to the Black Cultural Center to strategize and worked with the steering committee with Arnie Epps, the then-president of the BSM, and they set out an agenda for action. That was two years ago. The struggle had been going on for sixteen years—basically the past two and a half years now have been the more active movement. The movement fell within the mission of the Campus Y, which was the pursuit of social justice through the cultivation of pluralism. Since then it's become very personal. It's not just with the Campus Y, but you see it with the broader picture. You see the administration and the institution disrespect students, disrespect their own bodies that they set up. And you basically see it in the realm of institutional racism. I think that it's a much larger picture. You've got the BCC movement on the one hand, but if we give up now and if this movement doesn't follow all the way through, and we don't stick with our goal and our vision, which is to have the best possible BCC, which was on Wilson site, then we can't possibly expect to do anything with the housekeepers, or any other social injustice on this campus. It all falls into a much bigger realm..

RT: Did you see this as something you were doing for somebody else?

ML: Definitely wasn't "doing it to help." I think that I'm very against charity, per se, or "helping." It's empowered me. And the people working on it—this passion that they have definitely has empowered me. I didn't start out like that at all. I started out much more passive. You start seeing things differently, after you're around these people [points to Carolynn and Ruby] and you're around them with their vision. You start

seeing all the manipulation of the administration. It makes you start becoming passionate about the movement.

CM: With me I think it was the inverse of Michelle. I kind of saw the big, broad picture, and tried to bring it down to where I am now. For me it all started my freshman year with the Rodney King verdict. I sat there for hours on my bed by myself and cried. This is supposed to be the "land of the free"—I'm from the Netherlands and I'm not a citizen of this nation yet. And it was during that week that I decided that I need to do something about it. That made me in tune to what was going on on campus...I went to the speak-out and read things in the *Tar Heel*. My parents aren't politically involved. I think their leftism is in conversation and the ballot box but not beyond that. I started speaking out at like, speak-outs. I just called myself a little foot soldier, because every time somebody said something I would state the facts that I knew. I would just end up in conversation and at rallies. Eventually I ended up on the BCC advisory board—I was in the BSM. I always felt like I had something to say, to make it clear to people why this is important. It's not just "white culture" and then "black culture." It's the fact that black history has been left out of the history pages. And then once you become aware of it then you really find out how this country was built--how this university was built. How all these institutions came to be: basically off the labor of black peoples. But people then are still able to say, "Blacks are not, you know, some economic body that's important" like that comment that John Pope made. People can actually believe that because they don't know, they don't understand.

RT: What was the comment that Pope made?

CM: Can somebody quote it?

RS: He was on the Board of Trustees—just went off.

ML: He said basically that black people have not been significant as far as trade is concerned, and he wanted his children to learn about the race that meant something as far as global commerce was concerned.

RS: He said, like, Japan is much more important than black people.

CM: Even though that Europe could never have blossomed without Africa, or the U.S. without the slave labor of black people. People need to understand that--black people, white people, everybody. I mean,

black people don't know their own history let alone a larger society. People keep bringing up the argument, "What about Japanese culture? What about Chinese culture?" That's all well and good, but it's not so much a part of the way America was built as African-American culture. Once you understand that you understand why society is the way it is. That's what this building is dedicated to.

ML: People are still stuck on this idea of a multicultural center. It's a black/white issue. America—slavery—kind of sets off the black/white issue. People tend to forget that: "What about these other races?" Those are very, very important. I think racism deals with not a black/white thing, but a dominant race that tries to exploit races that are not in dominant power. But slavery in its significance and symbolism in America is something that needs to be countered, and the BCC and teaching people about the culture and about African Americans is something that has been completely neglected. And you can look at North Carolina and the fact that before Mel Watt and Eva Clayton—since 1901, there had not been a black congressman or woman elected. That just shows you that it's still very evident, and that you've got to counter that with education and through activism, and that's what we're trying to do here in this movement. For sixteen years it's been for a BCC. It's been promised and taken away and people have been manipulated. There's not been a movement for a "multicultural center." It's amazing to me that people are still stuck on that idea.

RS: Well, I think that's partly our fault, too, because we haven't been vigilant enough. Every year freshmen come in and they don't know what we've been through. I got involved because I was the co-chair of SEAC at the time, and my co-chair [Chris Baumann] was also with the Campus Y cabinet, and now works with the Housekeepers Movement. SEAC was also one of the first groups doing Housekeepers. He got really personally involved with the BCC. I was very interested in it that way and coming to be co-chair I wanted to see what that was all about. It seemed to me like the BCC—it's always been really obvious to me—this is what I always say—it's for or everybody on campus, because we all need to learn about black culture. I learned that from being an Af-Am minor, but also just the movement has demonstrated that there's such ignorance. Especially—and the Chancellor is the prime example of that, or people like John Pope. That just exemplifies the fact that there is ignorance—that there needs to be more education and there needs to be a BCC to do that. Because not everybody's gonna go out and major in African-American studies. So I got really personally interested in it that

was, and I kind of brought SEAC in with me after that, Chris and I did. A lot of the people in SEAC kind of had to be dragged in kicking and screaming. Some of them didn't even think there needed to be a free-standing BCC. But even if they did, they were like, "Well, why do we have to work on it? We're an environmental group. We're here because we like to recycle." That was really, really tough. That really sparked something in me personally, which led to my senior thesis and to me majoring in African American studies. Which is that you can't just do one thing, because it is all connected. One of the things that pulled me into it was that I've always thought the chancellor was a schmuck for an infinite number of reasons. Probably most of the people who sit up there are going to be schmucks because that's the way the system works. And that he's a schmuck to black people, he's a schmuck to students, he's a schmuck to environmentalists. That's not a coincidence that we have the same enemies. I think it drew a lot of other people in, too, because they did have hassles with the administration working on environmental issues, too. [Ed. note: That fall SEAC had their student union privileges temporarily suspended after they held a benefit luncheon at the union for the Housekeepers Association.] Same kind of thing—being very disrespected--as if it wasn't our campus.

CM: Yeah, the biggest thing that these people don't remember is that if it wasn't for us this university wouldn't exist. They are here for us. And somewhere along the line that has been lost, and one of the things in this movement is that we're gonna get that back. Because they're not gonna sit there on their high horse and make decisions without our input in it. They can't just give us something—especially something that we don't want. This is our university. Not only is this our university, but this is the rest of our lives, the things that we learn here. And if people can continue to be mis-educated, then we're just perpetuating a whole mis-society.

RS: Yeah, and I said that at the Spike Lee rally: not only is the existence of students that makes this institution and the administrators a reality—but if they dropped off the face of the earth tomorrow we'd still be here and we'd still get an education. We could even do it without teachers. It'd be harder—but I could learn from Carol and Carol could learn from me, you know. We don't need them, and they need us, or else they'd be out of work. So that was one reason that I found it to be a common struggle with stuff I had worked on in the past. My personal background is that I grew up in Chapel Hill with my ex-hippie parents in a liberal bubble, and I honestly had no idea there was still such a thing as racism

in the United States. Of course I knew what it was, but I never thought that it was actually still a reality in the 70's when I was growing up. I can't remember when I actually figured it out, but like, I was just so shocked when I found out people still did that. I've always been kind of interested in it but hadn't really done alot about it like in high school. I felt that it was a really good opportunity for me, I think, to get involved through SEAC, since I had been working on environmental issues for a couple of years, and I really wanted to work on a broader range of stuff. And also because the environmental justice movement had just been growing--that was really exciting. I started a new sub-committee [of SEAC]. We were working initially on the BCC and on the Low Level Radioactive Waste Dump and some general environmental racism education. And they're working on more stuff now. They're gonna work on the Housekeepers and NAFTA. I'm very excited about it because I left that committee and they're still going on. Actually, when I first set it up, I thought it'd be a really cool way to get people of color in SEAC, because SEAC was always, "Oh God, we're so white! How can we get more black people?" And we'd go and have our meetings in a dorm where lots of black people live, and it was like: well, it's the same meeting! So that wasn't very successful. But still, I did get together a bunch of really cool white people to work on these issues, which is what Stokely [Carmichael] would have said, that's probably the way to go, since that's who we are. When they had the public hearing on the site, I got a ton of SEAC people out there. I think that's great, because I think people need to see white people out there doing that. And I felt that a lot of my job in the movement is to say," Hey I'm a white person and this concerns me, too. This isn't just a 'black issue.'" It's an important thing because liberation for anybody is liberation for everybody. When I was in high school and you'd see videos of the civil rights movement—of people getting the crap beat out of them, or Martin Luther King speaking, it really, really moved me alot. I can't put my finger on it, exactly what it is—it's just emotionally very strong. I'm the one to remind the white people: "You need this—you need this really badly. You need this worse than the black people do—because they grew up in a black household—they know that they were descended from slaves.
You don't think about the fact that the guy next to you in class is lucky to get financial aid just to be here." White people don't think about that because they don't have to. A BCC makes people think about that.

RT: Was wanting to know more about black history what made you minor in it—taking it a step further than just taking one course?

RS: There's a lot of things that made me do it. I took an introductory Af-Am class. I liked it alot. The teacher was really cool—in fact she was white. A lot of the books we read were about women. I felt like, as a white person I needed to know more about the movement—to know exactly what happened, as an American, as a human being concerned with human rights. I'm not a very academically-oriented person. My major was all wrong for me. I found that with this Af-Am class, that it was bringing out something else in me. I was writing papers that I thought were actually interesting. I was enjoying writing them and I was also getting really good grades. I think that's what really sparked it in me, was that I was enjoying the work, and having academic success, which was always just a marginal thing for me, but it was neat that it was there. And I said, "Well, maybe I'll take some more of these." One of the classes I took as a minor was a study of the civil rights movement. And then I took a general African civilization class, which was extremely interesting. Colonization is something people really don't think about, which is what Michelle was making me think of before when she was saying how Europe is built on that. That's where the wealth comes from, just like the United States is built on slavery...Colonialism is such a pervasive thing in white culture.

CM: That's one of the things that made the issue personal for me. My parents are from South America—Surinam. My mother is part Jewish-Portuguese, my grandmother is Chinese, and there's the black African that's in my heritage. And for years I went around not really understanding how those things got together. I learned that in my freshman Af-Am class: the Portuguese settled all over the world, the English brought the Chinese to bring railroads and bridges in Africa and South America, and then the African slaves were brought, not just to the U.S. In Central America people of Hispanic origin are the ones in power. The six big families control 90% of the country's wealth. That's almost what could have happened in the U.S. Still, black people control--what, half a percent of the national wealth--and they make-up twelve percent of the population. And that's what brings the issue home to me—all that history of oppression is embodied in me, in my genetic makeup. And it's so frightening for me to think that if I hadn't taken that class I could have gone my whole entire life not knowing my history. And I'm the one who should know it. What makes me think that Ruby's gonna know?

RS: People are always so surprised that I'm an Af-Am minor, like, "why would you be interested in that?" But it's got everything to do with me and my life.

CM: In a sense I feel like you shouldn't have to be an Af-Am minor to know what you know. If our English department was corrected, if our History department was corrected, physics and chemistry, there probably wouldn't even be a need for a BCC. But it isn't--it's faulty. You can go on and get your masters', think you're all that, and never know how this country came to be.

RT: Let me ask about the actual organizing. Was the movement all of one mind or were there competing philosophies and agendas? (At this point Michelle has to leave.)

RS: There were administrators against it, and there were students who were, but there's not really an organized movement against it—if there was it might even be easier for us. The movement is very, very diverse. From some fairly radical black folks to some of the service-oriented Campus Y groups. I pretty much for years have intended to be an organizer, the rest of my life anyway. Other folks had never organized as such. I really wanted to help, but I couldn't in a lot of ways, because people couldn't listen to me. And unfortunately I don't think that just was because I was white, and they were resisting my control over it, but in at least a couple of cases it was also because I was a woman.

CM: As the black community it was so easy to just go ahead and almost say, "Oh, let them be," because black women in the movement have outnumbered men. To see some really powerful, strong black men come out, it was just like: "Wow, finally! They're here!"

RS: We're talking about BAC [Black Awareness Council] here. They were football players. Our previous stereotype was that they were jocks. We were so excited about that. [Ed. note: At the September 1992 rally, students applauded the suggestion by some players and Spike Lee: no BCC—no football.]

CM: I was really moved by this writer Michelle Wallace. She wrote on sexism in the Black Power movement in the 60's, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman. I mean, I only read 30 pages of that book and I was like, "God, we're living that again today." I've really seen these brothers grow and develop since.

RS: She'll [BCC Director Margo Crawford] tell me a story, and she'll do that all the time—tell me a story about some great white activist who did, you know, a whole bunch for abolition or something like that, and

really get me back encouraged and stuff. But it was so frustrating for me..

RT: How was separatism used as an accusation against the BSM?

RS: It's interesting that they throw that separatist thing in there because it's the white people who are afraid to go in there [Ed. note: during a well-publicized BCC open house last year, only four white students came.] And it's the chancellor who's promoted that, that white people should be afraid to go in the BCC. That is separatism, and that is originating from the white people. Probably 99% of black people want white people to go in the BCC to learn about black culture.

CM: There's no way you can call this movement separatist—everybody has been in this movement.

RS: I just thought of something. We had this meeting with the chancellor last summer: five, six black students, Margo, Pam and Zenobia who are also black women who are administrators here at the Y, Edith Wiggins—she's in Student Affairs. Anyway, there was me and the female co-president of the Y from last year—we were the only white folks from our side of the delegation there that met with the chancellor and some of his administrators. And we all spoke very strongly at that meeting—when he allowed us to get a word in. The black guys were very strong in that meeting. And we heard from people in Student Affairs that the he first thing the chancellor said after we all left that meeting was, "Find out who those two white women are, if their families have money—if they're powerful."

CM: That, and I remember that comment that Scott told me about. He came to Scott Wilkens [a co-chair of the Y] and said, "You must really hate me."

RS: Your fellow white male, I suppose is the subtext there.

RT: I remember being impressed at the September 1992 Spike Lee rally, when Scott said, "I no longer want the advantages of being white."

RS: Actually, that speech didn't go over very well. I can't remember what it was—some little slip—it was slightly patronizing.

CM: And then [Nation of Islam guest speaker] Khalid Muhammed after-

wards made fun of him. But the majority of black opinion was, "Scott's really a good guy" in his actions.

RS: You can imagine there were all kinds of problems that arose after Khalid spoke. A lot of white people were extremely alienated.

RT: That's all we read about for months.

RS: Yeah: "Forget that Spike Lee was here. This Muslim guy said 'cracker!'" I was offended by him, not as much really as a white person, but as a woman, or as a progressive person. Because he was just so conservative. He was complaining that the poor black men couldn't get anything done because the women were walking around with their skirts too high.

CM: I think he said some really good things—he said some really shitty things, too. He was a total sexist. And at the same time he glorified black womanhood..

RS: By putting her on a pedestal like they did white women a hundred years ago.

CM: But what really struck me about that was that white people got so offended by being called "cracker." Think how it feels where our whole race--you've got your white people up in BelAir and black people in the projects. There's some grey area in the middle, but that's how our society is divided. That's not just an accident, that's a system that's been in place for hundreds of years and degraded our people like that. And just think if that one word can piss you off that bad, just think how does my color race of people feel?

RS: Somebody is called "n------" every day on this planet.

CM: In this university.

RS: I can also relate very strongly to the white people who had so much trouble—who couldn't get past it. I'm like, "I just don't give a fuck about Khalid X!" But in national SEAC they have a People of Color caucus, and they asked all the white people to leave, and I couldn't get over it. I was all, "But I'm Jewish! My people were persecuted, too! And we were Russian peasants! I'm oppressed, too!" I just finally

released it: "It's OK—it's alright." It's hard for white people to get over that. It's probably a lot to do with what *Race Traitor* is about, I guess, is just getting over being white. I don't need to hold on to that like it's what's keeping me alive or anything. In fact, if I'm gonna do what I plan to do, I have to let go of it.

RT: What about media coverage?

RS: The papers would say "500 black students marched." It was more like 400 black people, 80 whites, 10 Asians. If it was reported accurately—that whites were marching with them, people would want to know why they were. We haven't really done as good a job as we could have making people realize that it [BCC] really was for everybody.

RT: I have a more general question: why now? What conditions do you think made things suddenly explode on campuses both here and around the country?

CM: I really don't know. I know that the things that we were asking for—if you go back to the 60's, the Black Inks [UNC black student newspaper] in the 60's, it's exactly the same. Things haven't changed at this university. Things haven't changed in this country fundamentally. There are more black people here now. You've got a few more black people in the power structure. But essentially—I think the core things just haven't changed. Well, the one thing that has changed (from the 60's) is that people would go beat us with clubs and send dogs on us. That's changed. But the things that we're fighting for still haven't changed.

RS: And you know what else? It's not that they don't want to put clubs on you—sic the dogs on you. It's that it's not socially acceptable anymore. It's socially less acceptable to be a racist now. Not unacceptable, but less acceptable than it was before.

CM: The structure of the society, the dynamics of the society, the level of consciousness in the society—it hasn't changed since the 60's. And maybe people thought that it had changed in the 70's and in the 80's, so maybe there was a lag in the activism. The thing that made me realize about Rodney King is that things just aren't that different. If there is something that is revitalizing this movement it's the realization that things just haven't changed, and they need to change.

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

BY PHIL RUBIO

I was and am a creature of the 1960's. Like many other political radicals of my generation, I was drawn into the movement through the combined effect of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements and the war in Southeast Asia.

The moral witnessing of the 1960's against the continued subjugation of black people and against America's colonial wars worked in ways that appeals to peoples' pocketbooks or, more broadly, their self-interest never did. However, the dismissal of moral actions became common sense in the left wing groups that were the residue of the rediscovery of Marxism in the late 1960's. That dismissal was accompanied by the adoption of a style of language that strove hard to avoid giving offense to any prospective ally. Although most of those groups have not survived the collapse of the various party-states they were loyal to, their posture and style are still much with us. I'd like to suggest that this common sense needs to be challenged if we are to find our way forward.

Let me do so by recalling two quite different historical moments--abolitionism in the mid-19th century and the war for Algerian independence in the mid-20th.

Readers will recall the textbook stories of how the Union was preserved from 1830 through 1850 through a series of carefully crafted compromises engineered by wise men such as Henry Clay. What is virtually always left out is that, with each compromise, slavery grew stronger. In his book, *Black Abolitionists*, Benjamin Quarles tells how black and white successors to the failed abolitionism of the early 1800's developed a new sense of immediatism that translated into relentless and vehement rhetoric, as well as daring action like slave rescue. Writing just before Nat Turner's revolt, David Walker called for militant action in his famous *Appeal*. William Lloyd Garrison proposed that the North should secede from the United States as a renunciation of slavery.

Quarles writes:

> Thus did abolitionism (in 1833) take on a new character, a direct confrontation--not a flank attack--on slavery. Impelled by a sense of urgency hitherto missing, these new spokesmen insisted that the nation face up to the question. The doctrine of immediatism had not originated with the abolitionists, but it had little influence before their arrival...
>
> They held that social revolutionaries may have to over-

reformers abandoned the restraints of polite discourse and went in for shock-effect statements.

Sounding very much like the militant abolitionists, Jean-Paul Sartre challenged the French in 1961: "A fine sight they are too, the believers in non-violence, saying that they are neither executioners nor victims. Very well, then, if you're not victims when the government you've voted for, when the army in which your younger brothers are serving without hesitation or remorse have undertaken race murder, you are, without a shadow of a doubt, executioners."

While deGaulle was saying, "We whites, we civilized men, owe it to ourselves to reach a common ground of understanding," Sartre was writing, "Today, the native populations reveal their true nature, and at the same time our exclusive 'club' reveals its weakness--that it's nothing more than a minority. Worse than that: since the others become men in name against us, it seems that we are the enemies of mankind; the elite shows its true colors--that it's nothing more than a gang."

Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir represented a small but influential tendency on the French left that played a significant part in wearing down France's colonial resolve. Although it's seldom possible to be precise in analyses of cause and effect, it may well be that their insistence affected the thinking of many outside the left. For example, in 1961, an entire regiment of the French Foreign Legion defected to the side of the Algerian National Liberation Front, and after the war it was disbanded in retribution.

Not too many years later, American activists would use their writings, as well as Fanon's, to oppose the Vietnam war. Many flaunted their "treason" with slogans like, "We are the Americong!" and the chant, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is gonna win!" The latter chant was first used by French students in 1968 and its moral boldness contrasts sharply with the Hearst-headline-sounding "Big Firms Get Rich--G.I.'s Die!"

Former SDS-Weatherman leader Mark Rudd, now a community activist living in New Mexico, was quoted in *Time* a few years ago as saying of the 60's generation of political activists, "Vietnam made us crazy." He could have added Birmingham and Watts and Newark. But, rather than see that craziness as a problem, I'd like to suggest that we could well use a little more craziness.

Frequently, I ask myself how we can be more immoderate in such apparently moderate times. Those of us who are considered white have always been advised to be "civil" even when protesting. As a result, we have a big problem when it comes to crossing that hypocritical boundary line.

As we all know, habits die hard. At the place where I now work, in Durham, North Carolina, a young white man from Boone, reacted one

day last spring when another white co-worker kept going on about the impending merger of Durham's mostly black and the surrounding mostly white school systems. "You just don't want your kids to go to school with black kids!" he exploded in his thick mountain drawl, as our black co-workers laughed. The guy was silent the rest of the day. What the young man did was break the unwritten and unspoken Southern post-Civil Rights era truce, which allows whites to communicate in integrated workplaces with euphemisms, in exchange for leaving overt displays of racism at home. In retrospect, the outburst certainly seems more effective than my less confrontational "let's stop the hysteria" approach.

Who am I, who are we, afraid of offending? The current debate here in North Carolina and throughout the South over official public display of Confederate symbols like the flag, Civil War monuments and encampments and the song "Dixie" has revealed an awful lot of white folks who are afraid of being **impolite** *and alienating those who celebrate their "Confederate heritage."* The fact that anyone, and especially a white progressive activist, has to take a deep breath before confronting any expression of white supremacy indicates how deeply ingrained are the white club's rules and the need for its abolition as surely as was the need for slavery's abolition over a century ago.

Granted, speaking out by itself won't change very much. But, acts that disrupt racial normality are a necessary part of the struggle for abolition. In his 1980 book, *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture*, Abbie Hoffman quoted himself as saying, during the 1969-1970 Chicago 8 Conspiracy Trial, that: "When decorum becomes repression, the only dignity free men have is to speak out."

In Dr. Quarles' book, he points out that, "...in 1830, a great majority of the 320,000 free Negroes were in the habit of regarding all whites as their enemies. The abolitionists changed this stereotype." Similarly, Malcolm X saw a different type of white student movement coming to life in 1965: "I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and the universities, will see the handwriting on the wall."

The historical tendency among African-Americans has been to be wary, to seek signs of splits and to encourage defectors from the white community. We abolitionists must adopt the same stance. There's a new restlessness among young people in the United States and Europe concerning race and it's going both ways. If we respond to that restlessness with time-tested "race-neutral" organizing, we will lose another opportunity.

The Simi valley verdict in April 1992, that triggered the LA rebellion, prompted a young white Raleigh office worker to wear a black armband to work and apologize to her black co-workers. This small deed was reported on the front page of Raleigh's *News and Observer*. At that same time, a Duke graduate student, without apparently realizing the

irony, told me that he had "problems with black nationalism" expressed at a mostly black Rodney King rally in downtown Durham and pointed out the presence of normally apolitical white Duke fraternity members (with their backwards ball caps).

The spontaneous responses of the office worker and of the fraternity members were not isolated events. They suggest that the ranks of potential defectors to the white race are larger than we might expect given the polite silences of everyday conversation. So long as the silences continue, no one knows what's possible. That moment in 1992 was one that we should have been ready for. We have to start practicing now. "Can I get a witness?" is a question commonly asked by any speaker in the black Christian church; rather than allowing the listener to merely go through the motions, it demands a response.

Can I get a witness?

Reflections on the Comparative History and Sociology of Racism

BY GEORGE M. FREDRICKSON

Historians who deal with black-white relations in the United States often refer to "racism" but rarely do they define the term precisely or develop a theoretical understanding of what it refers to that deeply affects their treatment of such matters as slavery, segregation, or black urbanization. Some use the word only when referring to a specific set of doctrines that arose in the nineteenth century and were discredited in the mid-twentieth, while others apply it casually and loosely to everything that is said and done when one group of people devalues and mistreats another that it believes to be genetically different from itself. For some purposes, perhaps, nothing much is lost by inattention or lack of analytical rigor. But the historian of comparative race relations needs sharper tools and stronger conceptualizations; otherwise he or she is likely to find a vague and undifferentiated attitudinal racism almost everywhere or a pure doctrinal racism in very few places or for limited periods. It is high time, I think, that historians devoted the same intense effort to understanding race as a transnational social and historical phenomenon that they have sometimes applied to class, gender, and nationalism. In my view, the term racism refers to something real, significant, and devilishly complex that needs to be conceptualized and analyzed if we are to comprehend some central aspects of American and world history

When sociologists and historians first wrote about racism in the period between World War II and the 1960s, they generally meant an explicit ideology based on the belief that population groups that could be distin-

This paper was the keynote address at a conference on American Studies in South Africa, held in June, 1992 at the University of Natal at Pieter Maritzburg, S.A. The writer is Professor of History at Stanford University and the author of The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union *(New York 1965),* The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, *(New York 1971),* White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History *(New York 1981), and* The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality *(Middletown, Conn. 1988).* *copyright George Fredrickson*

guished from each other by physical appearance or ethnic descent were different and unequal in genetically-determined mental and behavioral capabilities. As recently as 1967, for example, the British sociologist Michael Banton defined racism as "the doctrine that a man's behavior is determined by stable inherited characteristics deriving from separate racial stocks having distinctive attributes and usually considered to stand to one another in relations of superiority and inferiority."[1]

Such a doctrine or ideology could serve to justify or rationalize a range of policies, depending on the circumstances and aims of the racializing group. The principal possibilities were the subordination and unequal segregation of the "others," their exclusion or expulsion from a community or nation, or in the most extreme case their physical annihilation. Hitler's view of the Jews and of what should be done with them, the Southern white supremacist's conception of the African-Americans's place in nature and society, and much of the thinking that lay behind the inauguration of South African apartheid in the 1940s, were obvious and unambiguous examples of racism in this strict sense.

Since the 1960s, however, there has been a tendency to apply the term to attitudes and practices viewed as objectively harmful to the interests and aspirations of people previously designated as racially inferior, even though an explicit doctrine of innate racial differences is no longer being invoked as a rationale. Where groups defines as racially distinct remain unequal in rights or opportunities, members of underprivileged groups and their champions thus have a tendency to describe the attitudes and practices that sustain this inequality as "racist" even though claims of genetic superiority and inferiority are no longer being made. This view implies that a covert and implicit racism continues to operate after the intellectual foundations of the racist view of the world have been discredited. For the historian, there is the additional problem of trying to deal with patterns of discrimination that emerged before doctrinal or ideological racism was articulated by Western ethnological thinkers in the 18th and 19th centuries. In an early effort to grapple with this problem, I made a distinction between ideological and "societal" racism, with the latter referring to practices that treated a subaltern group as if it were inherently inferior to the socially dominant group even though an explicit doctrine of innate racial differences had not yet been promulgated and widely accepted.[2]

What we need for comparative historical analysis is a theoretical understanding of racism that is broad enough to take account of contemporary usage and also covers past discriminatory practices that were not motivated or justified by classic racist doctrine. But in seeking such breadth we must be careful to avoid credence that racism is an essential

or primordial human response to diversity, something that inevitably takes place when groups that we would define as racially different come into contact. It must be remembered that we are doing the defining and that the historical record shows that the designations or categories we are using did not always exist and were in fact constructed or invented by our ancestors. I agree with the American historian Barbara Fields when she contends in an influential essay that "race" and all the ideas and attitudes associated with it are the product of social contexts that change over time and not the reflection of some "transhistorical" impulse that is rooted in objective human differences. But Fields and other historians in the Marxist tradition who argue that "class" is real and "race" is not are captives of a theory of social relationships that arbitrarily privileges one form of social inequality over others. If class is defined very loosely as "the inequality of human beings from the standpoint of social power," there is no disagreement, although it is hard to make analytical use of such an all-encompassing concept. Problems emerge when Field invoked "the more rigorous Marxian definition involving social relations of production." Is it really true, as she claims, that class in this sense "can assert itself independently of people's consciousness" while race cannot?[3] People certainly do differ in economic power and position, but such differences have literally no meaning until they enter people's consciousness and are interpreted in some fashion. The specifically Marxian conception of two essential and perpetually antagonistic classes is not a necessary or purely logical deduction from the realization of economic inequality in a capitalist society. There could be more than two essential classes, and classes do not have to be viewed as inevitably at war. Class is as much an historical and social construct as race, which builds on differences that clearly exist but are not meaningful until interpreted in some way.

Besides differing in their relation to the means of production or to the market, people really do differ in physical characteristics, immediate or remote ancestry, and inherited cultural traits. Race emerges from the interpretation or construction of such non-economic differences to create a sense of group solidarity or peoplehood that can provide the basis for a claim of dominance or privilege over those considered outside of the group. If class refers to the universal fact that all societies have economies, race arises from the equally pervasive fact that all human beings have a sense of family or kinship. The construction of race is fundamentally different from the making of class only if one accepts a particular philosophy or metaphysics or history that cannot be empirically verified and fails to account for much of the history of human inequality.

Although race and class are both historical inventions--creative

interpretations of alternative types of human differences--it would be a mistake to infer that, once invented, they do not become durable and enormously influential ways of perceiving the world. The construction of class may lead to class conflict, revolution, and socialist societies. The construction of race may lead to secession in defense of racial slavery, the creation of social orders based on racial caste, or togas ovens for stigmatized peoples.

A good point of departure for understanding the relationship of race and class is Max Weber's writings on social hierarchy as a general phenomenon and stratification based on ethnicity or race as a special case. For Weber, "status," or the unequal assignment of honor and prestige to individuals and groups, may vary independently from "class," which he defines precisely as the economic or disadvantage that comes from objective relationships to a capitalistic market. Status may be based on aristocratic descent or the inability to maintain a prestigious lifestyle, but in multi-ethnic societies it can be derived simply from membership in an ethnic or racial group that has a history of being dominant over other groups.[4]

Using Weber's concept of "ethnic status" to get at the nature of racism allows us to sidestep the debate on the difference between race and ethnicity. As the American political scientist Donald L. Horowitz has argued persuasively in a broad-ranging comparative study of "ethnic conflict," the designation of people by skin color and the mistreatment of them on that basis has no special features that would distinguish it in any definitive theoretical way from group domination based on religion, culture, or the simple belief that some people have defective ancestry. It is only because Western culture has developed that peculiar notion that people can change religion or culture and be assimilated into a group other than the one in which they were born that the distinction has arisen. But even in the West the ascription of ethnic status has often been derived from something other than skin color reputed non-white ancestry. Northern Ireland has most, if not all, of the characteristics of what British sociologist John Rex calls a "race relations situation." A Catholic could certainly convert to Protestantism, but it is not only extremely unlikely that he would do so, but also doubtful whether he could thereby win full acceptance into the Protestant community. The key element in ethnicity is descent, and ethnic status emerges when a group of people with a real or fictive common ancestry assert their dominance over those who are believed to be of a different and inferior ancestry. The Burakhumin of Japan are descendants of a caste that once engaged in occupations that other Japanese considered unclean or impure. They do not differ in any apparent way in phenotype or culture

from other Japanese; but the discrimination against them, on grounds of descent alone, closely resembles the color discrimination of Western societies. One might conclude, therefore, that racism, or something so much like it as to be virtually indistinguishable, has no essential relation to skin color or other physical characteristics and need not even be based on palpable cultural differences. The essential element is the belief, however justified or rationalized, in the critical importance of differing lines of descent and the use of that belief to establish or validate social inequality.[5]

Ethnic status--the sense of being top dog because of one's ancestry--may come from the conquest or earlier enslavement of other ethnic groups or simply from being the original inhabitants of an immigrant-receiving society. To a degree that Weber did not anticipate, such a sense of social superiority could also develop in societies that considered themselves ethnically homogenous, placed great value on the lack of diversity, and were therefore unwilling to receive ethnic strangers into their national community--one thinks of the history of Australia and Japan, for example. Lest we fall into "essentialism," however, we have to bear in mind that the operative group definitions and boundaries are not fixed but are in fact constructed or reconstructed in response to changing historical circumstances. At the same time, we must also avoid overestimating how easily they change or how directly responsive they are to short-term historical developments. Constructed racial categorizations may endure for very long periods, as the career of the patently illogical "one drop rule" for defining African-American ancestry clearly exemplifies.[6]

Racism, then can be defined as an ethnic group's assertion or maintenance of a privileged and protected status vis a vis members of another group or groups who are thought, because of defective ancestry, to possess a set of socially-relevant characteristics that disqualify them from full membership in a community or citizenship in a nation-state. A racist society or polity functions like a private club in which the membership conceives of itself in a certain way and excludes those who do not fin in. (This analogy is especially apt, because under the "black ball" system all members do not have to be strongly prejudiced against an applicant for membership; they merely have to defer to the prejudices of others.) Such a sense of ascribed identity and entitlement naturally inclines its beneficiaries to defend their group,position if they believe it to be threatened. Many years ago the Weberian sociologist Herbert Blumer caught the essence of racism when he described race prejudice as an anxious sense of "group position."[7]

In contrast to the traditional definitions of racism, this one puts less

emphasis on precisely how the alleged deficiencies of the "other" are described and explained and more on how a group defines itself and its prerogatives. The essence of racism is caught by such old American expressions as "give him a white man's chance" or "she's free, white, and twenty-one." The complain that Euro-Americans are discriminated against because special efforts are being made to increase the number of blacks of other people of color in educational institutions or occupational fields in which they have been historically under-represented would not be racist if it were based on an accurate perception of Euro-American disadvantage, but it would be if, as often seems to be the case, it exaggerated or imagined that disadvantage and assumed, consciously or subconsciously, that it is right and natural for whites to predominate in positions of prestige and authority.

Racism as a general phenomenon is not tied to any specific set of beliefs about what makes a given minority undeserving of equal treatment. We know from the history of anti-semitism and anti-Japanese discrimination in the United States that racism of a virulent sort can be directed at groups believed to be superior, at least in their competitive efficiency, to an in-group seeking to protect its position. Using this definition, we would have no problem in considering the South African regime of the late 1980s (if not beyond) to be racist even though it was edging toward a willingness to "share" power with Africans and refrained from invoking doctrines of innate racial inferiority to justify its presumption that whites must retain de facto social and economic dominance in a reformed "multi-racial" South Africa. Similarly, those opponents of anti-discrimination or affirmative action programs in the United States who, implicitly or explicitly, base their resistance on fears of losing something to which they feel entitled by ethnicity or ancestry are clearly racist despite the fact they talk about acquired culture or competence rather than genetics. Even in Brazil, that allegedly most non-racist of color-differentiated societies, an element of racial status consciousness remains evident to the extent that a person of dark complexion continues to find that he or she must have more money or education than a white to attain a comparable social position.[8]

If Weber's concept of ethnic status helps us to understand racism in a general and theoretical way, it is not sufficient in itself to make sense of the history of racism in different societies. As the examples of black-white relations in the United States, Brazil, and South Africa suggest, racism varies greatly in intensity and in the role it plays in specific social structures, economies, and cultures. What accounts for differences in the nature and effects of racism in various color-coded societies? How do we explain the growth and decline of racist attitudes and

policies within a single nation's history? Anyone who has lived in the United States during the last three or four decades should realize that racism--or status consciousness based on race--changes over time in its strength and capacity to shape a social order. Blacks are far from equal in American society, but their status has obviously improved in significant ways, and white racism, while still very much alive, has declined to some extent at least in power and intensity. How do we account for such changes?

Variability and change in ethnic status and consciousness depend to a considerable extent on variations or changes in power relationship among ethnic groups. To the degree that an oppressed and stigmatized group can somehow gain in physical resources, political power, and cultural recognition or prestige, it can induce or force a dominant group to share its right and privileges. This in turn can gradually erode the material and even the psychological foundations for a herrenvolk's sense of itself as a group with clearly defined borders and a collective sense of entitlement. Unfortunately, the process is irreversible; loss in power, for whatever reason, normally entails a loss of status or prestige. Emancipation from slavery or other forms of directly coerced labor does not by itself empower a group to challenge its subordinate status and the stigma that continues to be associated with servile ancestry, but it does unsettle the power equation by opening new possibilities for action to challenge the racial order as well as new dangers of marginalization, expulsion, or even extermination.

Many historical examples could be offered from the history of countries like the United States, Brazil, and South Africa to show how political or economic power affect consciousness of ethnic status. One of the most important reasons why free people of color in Brazil had greater opportunities for upward mobility than their American counterparts in the era of slavery, and were thus in a position to win a greater degree of social acceptance, was the vital role they played in the plantation economy as growers of foodstuffs, herders of livestock, and catchers of escaped slaves. The "free Negroes" of the Old South could not play such a role because there was a large population of non-slaveholding whites to service the plantation economy.[9] But the acquisition of political power by southern African-Americans during the Reconstruction era gave them, during the relatively brief period when they could exercise their right to suffrage, an influence over public policy greater than that enjoyed by freed people in Brazil after their emancipation, which was completed in 1889. Laborers' lien laws, giving the worker priority over the merchant in the division of the planter's crop after the harvest, were a tangible result of this temporary gain in political leverage.[10]

But nothing is more dangerous for a racialized minority fighting for equality than a partial and precarious accession of power. Majority backlash is the normal response; if not resisted by a national government acting for its own purposes popular resistance to minority rights can readily erase most of the gains made under an earlier dispensation of national power. This in a nutshell is the story of the decline and fall of Radical Reconstruction in the southern states. The subsequent disfranchisement of southern blacks after white supremacists regained control was congruent with efforts to place them at the mercy of employers or landlords and restrict their opportunities to acquire wealth and property or to follow occupations other than sharecropper, laborer, or servant. The partial success of this effort made it possible for whites to stereotype turn-of-the-century blacks as radically and irremediably inferior. Only when blacks migrated in great numbers to the relatively freer atmosphere of the Northern states after 1914 did they again have a chance to acquire the resources and political clout to challenge the Jim Crow system and begin to elevate their ethnic status in ways that eventually impelled whites to abandon their claims to a racial hierarchy sustained by law.

Recent developments in South Africa also reflect changes in the racial power equation, despite the fact that Africans are still denied the right to vote and hold office. The government's decision to attempt some form of conciliation that points to the enfranchisement of the black majority is due in large part to the leverage that black protesters have gained over the South African economy--internationally, through the ability of the anti-apartheid movement to promote sanctions and disinvestment, and domestically, through their growing influence as organized workers or consumers and their ability to resist white rule in ways that could make the country ungovernable and thus undermine the security and prosperity of the white minority.[11]

Such examples suggest that racism is not a constant and unalterable fact of life in ethnically-divided societies. For Weber, status was only one of three analytically distinguishable but overlapping and interacting sources of social inequality. Others were "class" as determined by objective relations to the market, and "party," meaning ability to influence publicdecisions through political organization and access to suffrage and office-holding.[12] As Weberian sociologists have often pointed out, inequalities of class, status, and party do not always coincide.[13] A main historical dynamic is the interaction of one form of inequality with the others--how stratification of one kind conflicts with the others or reinforces them, as the case may be. Under a system of racial slavery, there is of course little or no contradiction; the three Weberian categories coincide almost perfectly. Blacks in the Old South had almost no access

to social prestige, government, or the marketplace. After emancipation, however, the three types of inequality could vary independently. At the height of the Jim Crow era at the turn of the century, an approximation to the early pattern of total subordination was almost achieved--but not quite. Because there was now an emerging black middle class, albeit one that was mainly restricted to a segregated economy, there was no longer a close fit between class and racial caste as during the slave era. Furthermore, as we have seen, the exclusion of southern blacks from American politics was mitigated to some extent by accelerating migration to the North where the right to vote and hold office persisted. But the ethnic status of blacks in the nation as a whole, as reflected in the generally unfavorable or derogatory stereotypes projected by the dominant culture and in the pervasiveness of social segregation and discrimination, may have been at a low point in the period between 1910 and the Great Depression. One recalls here the segregation of the federal civil service in 1913, the popularity of the blatantly racist film Birth of a Nation in 1915, the official U.S. admonition to French authorities in 1917 to discourage fraternization between French civilians--especially women--and black soldiers out of deference to the belief of most white Americans in black inferiority and social unacceptability, and the bloody race riots and resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the immediate post-war years. But this was also the period when the NAACP won its first court victories and came close to getting anti-lynching legislation through Congress. In addition to limited political leverage, black migration to the North brought access to industrial jobs and better educational facilities.[14]

The persistence of a sharply-defined ethnic status hierarchy in the United States between World War I and the 1940s--a time when blacks were making some economic and political advances--does not prove that ethnic status is unaffected by changes in political and economic empowerment. In the long term, as developments in the 1950s and 60s demonstrated, substantial and durable gains in one respect can be translated into gains in the others. Racism gains much of its strength and legitimacy from ingrained cultural attitudes, which of course change more slowly than the social and economic structures with which they were once associated in a direct and transparent way. But change they do, and it would be difficult to maintain indefinitely a culturally sanctioned sense of status in the face of substantial changes in the class and power position of a subordinate group. Racism does have a life of its own but not in the sense that it can persist without changing its character and gradually losing some of its force in the face of dramatic and durable improvements in the material and power position of a disadvantaged ethnic

group. Some might argue that this is getting the cart before the horse, that you cannot gain economic and political empowerment for an oppressed minority without changing the status attitudes of a dominant group. But what I am in fact advancing is a kind of interactionist or feedback model of change. Increases in power affect attitudes and changing attitudes open access to power.

How, one might ask, does such a process get started? Studies of the history of race relations in several societies suggest that something extraneous to the racial order has to occur, normally some larger economic or political development that calls for adjustment by the society as a whole in ways that have accidental or unintended advantages for subordinated status groups, before such a dialectic can be set in motion.

Major wars or intense international competition among nations can have such a catalytic effect on race relations. The Paraguayan War of 1865-1870 speeded Brazil on the path to slave emancipation because it became necessary to use thousands of slaves as soldiers and to reward them for their participation by freeing them.[15] Black Americans were of course freed from bondage as the result of a Civil War that was fought primarily for the preservation of the federal union and not for their liberation. As a result of the necessities and opportunities of war, emancipation and the use of black troops became a means to the end of national integrity. The victories of the Civil Rights movement a century later were aided, perhaps decisively, by the belief of influential and powerful whites that Jim Crow was a serious liability in America's competition with the Soviet Union for the "hearts and minds" of Africa and Asia.[16] If white South Africa has become serious about the dismantling of apartheid and negotiating with African nationalists, it is because black resistance and the threat of international sanctions have raised fears that, unless something is done to accommodate blacks within a capitalistic framework, a future South Africa will have no place at all for an affluent and acquisitive white minority. What all these examples suggest is that in times of national peril or catastrophe, inclusive forms of nationalism, sometimes encouraged by a belief that survival on any terms available requires a redefinition of citizenship, may prove stronger than ethnic status consciousness and open the way to lowering or even eliminating barriers to the participation and empowerment of oppressed racial groups.

A more fundamental and less contingent force that undermines traditional racial hierarchies and the status claims they engender are long-term trends in the structure and value systems of modern societies away from "ascription" and toward "achievement" as a basis for status and power. We need not adopt the naive view that these trends are irresistible or that industrial is a direct and automatic solvent of ethnic strati-

fication--the long career of apartheid in South Africa and of group conflict in Northern Ireland show that this is not the case--to recognize that ethnic hierarchies become more problematic and vulnerable when they are the only form of ascribed status that persists in an open and publicly-sanctioned way. The role of explicit racist ideology, when it was in its heyday in the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War, was to rationalize the conspicuous exceptions to the emergent model of a liberal, open-class society that could be found in places like South Africa, the American South, and various colonies of European nations.

But the period since World War II has seen an international revulsion against racism, inspired in large part by the increasing role in international affairs and organizations played by the emerging nations of Asia and Africa.[17] Another important impetus for change is the internationalization of capitalist enterprise, a development that has made racial prejudice a liability for those who would seek to compete with the Japanese and other Asians for world markets. Vast international inequalities that correlate roughly with color persist, but the current tendency to talk of the resulting conflict as pitting rich nations against poor ones may reflect the nature of this struggle better than the language of race that would have been more appropriate in the age of conquest and colonization.

The trend toward a world-wide struggle based on "class" in the Weberian sense, or between those who have a favored access to markets and scarce resources and those who do not, is to some extent paralleled within industrialized nations with strong traditions of racial or ethnic inequality. It is clear to most observers of contemporary Brazil that the central issue is the vast differential between a rich minority and an impoverished majority. The fact that people of darker skin are disproportionately represented among the poor is evidence of a long history of slavery and racial prejudice but is not the central fact about the current situation. Emancipating the poor as such would seem to be the main challenge, despite the exposure of subtle but persistent forms of discrimination that has recently compelled Brazilians to recognize that they do not in fact have a "racial democracy."[18]

Even in South Africa, as has already been suggested, an analysis based in part on an assessment of the prospects for class conflict or accommodation may give a better sense of the forces currently at work than one that sees the struggle exclusively in racial or ethnic terms. Racism is of course the historical force that gave this version of capitalist industrialization its peculiarly segmented quality. But two theoretically color blind ideologies, free market capitalism and Marxian socialism, have gained strength at the expense of a statist and corporatist doc-

trine of white supremacy on the one hand and a racially-defined black nationalism on the other; workers and employers alike seem increasingly to view the struggle in class terms.[19] Contrary to what one might expect from Marxist-Leninist theory, such a redefinition or reconstruction of the situation may actually increase the prospects for a peaceful transition of power; for history shows that class adjustments and compromises are easier to bring off than the reconciliation of groups that view their differences as primarily ethnic or racial. But South Africa still has a ways to go before it achieves a viable combination of majority rule and minority rights. Significant differences remain over how much power the majority should have and how it should be exercised. The government and much of the white electorate may still cling to the hope that they can keep the substance of white power and privilege by giving up the trappings and allowing a middle-class black minority to share their advantages. But such a strategy is unlikely to be effective. Only through policies that give hope and some measure of security to black workers and peasants can South Africa be kept from blowing up or degenerating into chaos.

What of current black-white relations in the United States? Historically speaking, racism--in Weberian terms, Euro-American status consciousness--has tended to predominate over any consciousness of class that transcends racial categories. The inability of the southern Populist movement of the late nineteenth century to build an interracial political coalition in the face of its opponents appeals to racial solidarity is a well-known example of this tendency. Another is the notorious difficulty of uniting black and white workers in a collective struggle for class interests, as reflected in the long history of anti-black discrimination by organized labor and the failure of socialist movements to attract substantial black support. During the height of the Great Depression, when it appeared to many that there were unprecedented opportunities for class action across racial lines, W.E.B. Du Bois was driven despite his growing sympathy for Marxism, to espouse the economic self-segregation of blacks, because he despaired of the capacity of white workers to overcome their cultural racism.[20] Three decades later, after the civil rights movement had freed southern blacks from de jure segregation and de facto disfranchisement, advocates of black power and black nationalism came to a similarly pessimistic assessment of the ability of American society to overcome racial segmentation. The Kerner Report's 1968 description of the nation as "moving toward two societies, one black and one white--separate and unequal" was evidence of a general sense in the late 1960s that the United States was still a society stratified by race or ethnic status and not merely by economic or class differences.[21]

Ten years later, however, a leading black sociologist, William Julius Wilson, argued that race was declining in significance and that the situation of blacks in American society could now best be approached in terms of class.[22] Wilson, who has refined and elaborated his argument in a more recent work on the black "underclass,"[23] based his case primarily on the growth of a substantial black middle class that he believed was being successfully integrated into the larger American middle class. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier position of black elites who have been condemned by racism to seek higher status exclusively within the segregated African-American community. But the price of this desegregation of elites was that blacks who could not qualify for middle-class opportunities because of lack of skills, education, and employment possibilities were stranded in the ghettos without middle-class leadership or behavioral examples. Consequently, their condition had worsened, and the nation faced the major social problem summed up in the phrase "black underclass." Underclass disabilities, Wilson concluded, were mainly a matter of class rather than race and needed to be addressed as such, mainly through social-democratic or New Deal-type policies.

Wilson's theories are controversial and have been sharply criticized by those black sociologists and historians who believe that racism is not only alive and well but perhaps even stronger than ever.[24] I find much of value in Wilson's analysis and believe that the social-democratic policies he recommends would alleviate inner-city poverty and demoralization. But he has somewhat overstated his case and has not always made it sufficiently clear that he has identified an uneven and reversible trend rather than an accomplished reality. It is certainly true that the black middle class suffers substantially less than in the past from specifically racial discrimination, but the affirmative action policies that made such advancement possible are now endangered by decisions of the Supreme Court and the civil rights policies of Republican administrations. Recent campus incidents suggest that black achievers and aspirants for middle-class status are not immune from harassment by white middle-class kids who resent what they views as special privileges or unfair advantages for African-Americans, and subtle but effective forms of discrimination persist in white-collar employment, corporate bureaucracies, advancement in the professions, and access to credit for home mortgages. Middle-class assimilation, in other words, is not as complete or as certain as Wilson sometimes implies. Furthermore, it would be hard to deny that the black underclass is feared and despised by many whites not merely for its poverty and statistical propensity to commit crimes or use drugs but also for reasons of race. Clearly the Willie Horton stereotype, as employed by operatives of the Bush campaign in

1988, is racially charged and not merely the product of class anxieties. What has changed is that education and wealth can to some extent, often to a considerable extent, compensate for the stigma of African-American appearance and ancestry. (Although it might be hard to convince a middle-class African-American trying to hail a taxicab in a big city of this fact.) But to be both poor and black is to be doubly disadvantaged. The Rodney King affair is the latest example of what it costs to be at the bottom of both the class and ethnic status hierarchies. Until this situation changes, it cannot truly be said that race is no longer significant and that the United States can confront its inequalities exclusively in terms of class.

But Wilson's problematic interpretation of current race relations may have some value as prophecy. The deepening economic deprivation and insecurity that relatively large numbers of blacks share with somewhat smaller proportions of other racial and ethnic groups makes it conceivable that a sense of class division could eventually eclipse race consciousness as the main source of public conflict in American society. Status based on race and the politics of status protection stubbornly persist and may even increase in hard times--as the showing of David Duke in the Louisiana gubernatorial election last fall graphically demonstrates--but they lack ideological legitimacy and no longer, as in the past, sustain a functional segmentation of labor based on race. Opportunities for the construction of class and the deconstruction of race may now exist to an unprecedented degree, because blacks are no longer consistently and categorically relegated to lower-caste status, a development that changes basic social alignments and makes class-based responses to the growth of social and economic inequality more likely. Although the opposite extreme of a home-grown fascism based on a heightened Euro-American ethnicity is also a possible outcome of struggles over a shrinking economic pie, the preponderance of evidence suggest to me that a decisive and lasting reversion to racial scapegoating is somewhat less likely than an uneven advance toward racial democracy. My comparative historical perspective permits the hope, if not the confident expectation, that aplausible combination of circumstances and initiatives could lead to the end of racism as a principal determinant of inequality in the United States. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr.--will it matter so much what kind of ship our ancestors came over in, when we realize that we are all in the same boat now?

NOTES

1 Michael Banton, *Race Relations* (New York, 1967), p. 8. Realizing the narrowness and limited applicability of this definition, Banton uses the

term "racialism" to cover theattitudinal and institutional aspects of racial domination. In myown work, I have reserved the term racialism for thinking thatassumes significant innate racial differences but refrains frominterpreting these differences in an overtly hierarchical fashion. See *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* ((New York, 1971; Middletown, Conn., 1987), Ch. Four. In another book published in 1967, the American sociologist Pierre van den Berghe also defined racism as a specific form of ideology that necessarily involved the belief that "organic, genetically transmitted differences (real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics" and made the point that "Western racism is a fairly well-defined historical phenomenon; it came of age in the third or fourth decade of the nineteenth century, achieved its golden age approximately between 1880 and 1920, and has since entered its period of decline." See *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1967), pp. 11, 15.

2 See *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown, Conn., 1988)

.3 Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History" in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York,1982), pp. 150-151 and passim.

4 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., (Berkeley, 1978), pp. 385-398, 926-939.

5 Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 41-54. See also John Rex, "The Concept of Race in Sociological Theory" in Sam Zubaida, ed., *Race and Racialism* (London, 1970), pp. 35-55.

6 See F. James Davis, *Who is Black: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pa., 1991).

7 Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race*, pp. 210-211; Herbert Blumer, "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position," *Pacific Sociological Review*, I (1958), pp. 3-7.

8 On Brazil see especially Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971), I.K. Sundiatta, "Late Twentieth Century Pattern of Race Relations in Brazil and the United States," *Phylon* XLVII (1987), pp. 62-76, and George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo, Brazil* (Madison, Wisc., 1991).

9 Degler, *Neither Black Nor White*, pp. 44-46; Marvin Harris,*Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York, 1964), pp. 84-89.

10 See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York, 1988).

11 See George M. Fredrickson, "Can South Africa Change?" The *New York Review of Books*, October 26, 1989, pp. 48-55 and "The Making of Mandela," ibid, September 27, 1990, pp. 20-28.

12 Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 926-939.

13 See, for example, Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics and Migration in the United States, 1900-1930 and Britain, 1948-1968* (London, 1973), pp. 18-21.

14 On the black migration and some of its consequences see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989).

15 Degler, *Neither Black Nor White*, p. 77.

16 Fredrickson, *Arrogance of Race*, p. 267; Harvard Sitcoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1964-1980*, (New York, 1981), pp. 16-17.

17 A good account of the international campaign against racism can be found in Paul Gordon Laure, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder, Colo., 18 Sundiatta, "Patterns of Race Relations," pp. 74-75. The extent and persistence of racial inequality in Brazil, as well as the belated rise in the 1970s and 80s of an anti-racist movement in that country, are discussed in Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in Sao Paolo.* 1988).

19 On these ideological developments, see Stanley Greenburg, *Legitimating the Illegitimate: State, Markets, and Resistance in South Africa* (Berkeley, 1987) and Julie Frederikse, *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

20 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk at Dawn: An Essay Toward theAutobiography of a Race Concept* (New York, 1940), ch. 7

21 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York, 1968), p.1.7.

22 William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago, 1978).

23 William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987).

24 See, for example, Alphonso Pinkney, *The Myth of Black Progress* (Cambridge, Eng., 1984) and Clayborne Carson, "Why the Poor Stay Poor," *Tikkun*, July-August, 1988, pp. 67-70.

The White Worker and the Labor Movement in Nineteenth-Century America

by Noel Ignatiev

Ask a panel of labor historians, old or new, to name the most important worker uprisings in America's past and chances are they will list the Flint Sit-Down, the 1919 Steel Strike,Pullman, 1877, perhaps one or two others. No matter how long the list, it will never include the New York City insurrection of July, 1863.

It began at the hour of work, as a strike at the city's railroads, machine shops, shipyards, foundries, and building sites. Employing a familiar tactic, strikers formed a procession which marched through the industrial district closing down shops and calling upon workers to join in. The strike quickly turned into a full-scale insurrection, as workers fought with the police, erected barricades, and attacked symbols and representatives of the government in Washington. Within hours of the outbreak the insurrectionists managed to acquire weapons, post sentinels and set up internal communications, and form committees to clear the tenements of enemy agents. They developed mechanisms to identify supporters and opponents among the commercial strata and imposed a rigid moral conformity in their neighborhoods. When the possibility came up of the authorities summoning troops from Albany, the crowd dispatched contingents to cut telegraph lines, tear up railroad tracks, and destroy ferry slips. As in every popular uprising, women and children played a vital part. In short, the insurrectionists created the rudiments of dual power -without a single newspaper, labor union, political club, or public figure coming forth to identify with the insurrectionists and speak openly in their name (and, we may add, without any vanguard party to instruct them in the art of insurrection).

This is the text of a talk given at the History Department Seminar, Queens' University, Kingston, Ontario, on March 26, 1992. Noel Ignatiev is one of the editors of Race Traitor.

The insurrectionists committed horrible atrocities against the city's black population -estimates of the number of black victims go as high as one thousand, many with their bodies mutilated. They burned homes and even a colored orphanage.

The uprising took place during a bitter war, at a time when enemy forces were a hundred-odd miles away. Quite mindful of the circumstances, the insurrectionists raised the enemy flag and cheered the name of its president. (Had Lee managed to avoid engagement at Gettysburg and instead marched his troops into New York City, the Civil War might have had a different outcome.) On the whole, the five days of July 1863 in New York City call out for comparison with the Communards of Paris who stormed the heavens eight years later.

The events I recount are, of course, familiar under the name of the New York City Draft Riots. Historians normally chronicle them in the annals of race relations, in accounts of social disorder and the emergence of the modern state, or as an episode of the Civil War -anywhere but as part of labor history. Yet everyone knows that they were sparked by class inequities in the military draft and grew out of an effort of laborers and industrial workers to enforce a white monopoly of certain occupations.[1]

The Draft Riots were thoroughly consistent with pre-War attitudes of the labor movement toward slavery and the Afro-American. For example, in an 1840 article, "The Laboring Classes," Orestes Brownson compared the systems of slave and free labor. "Of the two," he wrote,

> "the first is, in our judgement, except so far as the feelings are concerned, decidedly the least oppressive. If the slave has never been a free man, we think, as a general rule, his sufferings are less than those of the free laborer at wages. As to actual freedom one has just about as much as the other. The laborer at wages has all the disadvantages of freedom and none of its blessings, while the slave, if denied the blessings, is freed from the disadvantages."[2]

The comparison between free and slave labor in favor of the latter was more than a rhetorical flourish; it was a guide to action for the early movement of the free laborers. This was explicitly stated by George Evans, follower of Robert Owen and Fanny Wright, activist in the New York Working Men's party after 1829, and editor of the Working Man's Advocate. Evans attained his greatest prominence as a proponent of free land in the West (a program which found white supremacist form in the Free Soil and Republican parties). In a letter to the anti-slavery leader, Gerrit Smith, Evans wrote, "I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very

warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery. Since I saw this, I have materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing negro slavery. I now see, clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless white, would hardly be a benefit to him..." In response to the argument that he justified slavery by saying it was not as bad as the situation of the free laborer, Evans insisted that he opposed slavery, but added, "there is more real suffering among the landless whites of the north, than among the blacks of the south," and that the abolitionists "err[ed] in wishing to transfer the black from the one form of slavery to the other and worse one."[3]

Evans was giving voice to the commonly held views of white labor radicalism on those occasions when it was forced to express itself on the slavery question. He was not alone. The American Fourierists criticized the abolitionists for thinking slavery was the only social evil to be extirpated, and warned of the dangerous consequences of their view. "Negro slavery in the South," they explained, "was one only of many forms of slavery that existed on the earth... Consequently [the Associationists] did not contemplate the removal of this one evil alone and direct their exertions wholly against it; they wished to abolish all evil and all forms of slavery." The abolitionists had a ready reply to these arguments: "Before we can settle the relations of man to society, we must know who and what is man.... Anti-slavery then underlies all other reforms, for it asserts the natural equality of all men, without regard to colour or condition. Until this principle is recognized as practically true, there can be no universal reform. There can be even no partial reform... for the evils of Slavery ... permeate the relations of every individual in the land."[4]

Involved in this exchange were fundamental issues of direction for free labor radicalism. The story of one activist, Seth Luther, shows the consequences of the choices that were made. Luther was born in Rhode Island in 1795, the son of a Revolutionary War veteran. He grew up in poverty, and had only a few years of common-school education, but did manage to learn carpentry. As a young man he took off on a tour of the west and south. Returning to New England, he did a stint in the cotton mills, which he left for a career as an itinerant agitator. A circular he wrote for a strike of Boston carpenters sparked the 1835 Philadelphia general strike. In 1832 he made his Address to the Working Men of New England, which he delivered on numerous occasions and which was printed the following year in a New York edition on George Evans's presses and went through several editions afterwards. In that address, Luther angrily denounced the factory system at length for its cruelties. He repeatedly compared its victims to Southern slaves, usually to the

disadvantage of the free laborer. For example, he pointed out that children of six years old worked longer hours in the mills than slaves in the West Indies, whose work day was limited to nine hours. He noted that "the wives and daughters of the rich manufacturers would no more associate with a 'factory girl' than they would with a negro slave." He pointed out that the women who labored their life away in the mills "have not even the assurance of the most wretched cornfield negro in Virginia, who, when his stiffened limbs can no longer bend to the lash, must be supported by his owner." And he noted that "the slaves in the South enjoy privileges which are not enjoyed in some of our cotton mills. At Dover, N.H., we understand, no operative is allowed to keep a pig or a cow..."

What are we to make of this rhetoric? In the first place, Luther was not exaggerating the evils of the factory system (although, of course, he was omitting from the comparison with chattel slavery the degradation of being property, which no wage laborer suffered). In the second place, Luther was personally sympathetic to the plight of the slave; in another address he told of his travels in the South and his conversations with slaves, which taught him to respect their intelligence and pity their condition. But he could not see slavery as part of the labor problem.[5] Not only slavery but race discrimination, South and north, was absent from his calculations, as we shall see.

In the state of Rhode Island a high property qualification for suffrage kept about two-thirds of the state's white male adults from voting. As part of the popular upsurge of the period, a movement developed aimed at striking down the restrictions. It gained quite a bit of support, particularly among working men, and Luther became involved, with an Address on the Right of Free Suffrage, which he delivered in 1833 in Providence. In 1840 Providence mechanics and working men formed the Rhode Island Suffrage Association, which renewed agitation for the franchise. The leader of the movement, Thomas Dorr, was a descendant of an old Yankee family, graduate of Phillips Exeter and Harvard; in the past he had supported abolitionist causes.

What to do when the group legally empowered to broaden the franchise refuses to do so? The Suffrage Association decided to go ahead and call a People's Convention to draft a new constitution for the state.

At first black people took part in Suffrage meetings and voted in Association elections. The issue of their role came up explicitly in September of 1841 when a black Providence barber, Alfred Niger, was proposed as treasurer of the local suffrage association. His nomination was defeated, and conflicting resolutions on the subject were brought to the People's Convention, which met in October. Some of the leading

New England abolitionists, including Abby Kelley and Frederick Douglass, visited Rhode Island, agitating to strike the word "white" from the proposed constitution. The Convention, after debate, refused. Thus, the misnamed People's Convention answered the question, what is a man? At the convention Dorr argued in favor of black suffrage. Once his plea was rejected, however, he chose to remain with the Suffragists, even at the cost of breaking his ties with abolition. Garrison expressed-abolitionist sentiment when he wrote, "It is not for me to espouse the cause of any politician, especially one like Thos. W. Dorr..."[6]

The Convention, naming Dorr as its candidate for governor, resolved to hold elections in April of the following year, based on universal white manhood suffrage. In the fall of 1841, the Law and Order party was on the defensive as the Suffragists campaigned to mobilize people to vote in the spring. The only active opposition came from the abolitionists, who denounced the attempt by "pseudo friends of political reform, to make the rights of a man dependent on the hue of his skin." Mobs of Suffragists broke up their meetings, made proslavery speeches, and denounced the Law and Order party as the "nigger party." Dorr was present on one occasion while a mob broke up an abolition meeting, and watched silently.[7]

The suffrage association went ahead with its election in April, 1842. Announcing that it represented a majority of voters, it declared Dorr governor. Rhode Island was now presented with a classic situation of dual power -two administrations, each claiming to be the legal government of the state. It was an unstable situation, and everyone knew it.

Each side rallied its forces; in a clever maneuver, the Law and Order party offered to grant the vote to black men on the same terms as to whites (on the basis of a somewhat-broadened electorate), in return for their support against the Dorrites, and recruited black men into militia units. On the night of May 18, the Dorrites attempted to capture the arsenal. The attempt failed. Black militia units guarded vital points in Providence and played a key role in defeating the Dorrite assault. Following the failure of the arsenal attempt, black volunteers helped suppressed Dorrite resistance throughout the state.[8]

I submit that those black people who fought on the side of the Law and Order party were acting as much in the interests of the working class as those whites who fought for the Suffrage Association. They were declaring their intention to enter the movement as full equals, or not at all. In doing so they were carrying out what C.L.R. James called the essence of principled politics: "to let the class of which you are a member and the country in which you live go down to defeat before an alien class and an alien nation rather than allow it to demoralize and destroy

itself by adopting means in irreconcilable conflict with the ends for which it stands."[9]

Their deal with the Law and Order party gave the black people of Rhode Island equal voting rights with whites. Rhode Island was the only state where black people, having lost the right to vote, regained it prior to the Civil War. They were able to make use of it over the next two decades, particularly in Providence, where they sometimes constituted the balance of power in closely contested elections.

What of Seth Luther? He fought valiantly in the assault on the arsenal, and served as organizational secretary in the Dorrite encampment, but was captured and imprisoned. Held after other prisoners were released (perhaps because he refused to renounce the suffrage cause, instead denouncing cowards and turncoats), he was put on trial for treason. Convicted and sentenced to jail, he attempted to escape, failed, was discharged from prison, immediately rearrested, and was finally released in March of 1843. He at once embarked on a tour of the West, where he sought to enlist support for Dorr. From Illinois he wrote, "Thousands are ready, able and willing to march on Rhode Island equipped and provisioned to the rescue of Governor Dorr..." One of his initiatives was an effort to strike a deal with Senator John C. Calhoun, the leader of the proslavery party in the Senate. Calhoun refused, on the grounds that if he came out in support of suffrage for propertyless whites in Rhode Island, some anti-slavery congressman would be sure to introduce a resolution supporting the right of the slaves to form a constitution; but the overture was significant. Luther returned to the east, and then (in what some have called a striking departure and attributed to a mental breakdown but which was more consistent than at first appears) he volunteered to serve in the army for the Mexican War. Nothing came of his offer (he was forty-seven years old), and the next heard of him was an unsuccessful attempt to rob a bank in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was committed to a lunatic asylum, shifted around among institutions, and died in an asylum in Brattleboro, Vermont on April 29, 1863 -barely two months before the outbreak of the New York City Draft Riots, the roots of which can be seen in his personal trajectory.

The tragedy of Seth Luther was not his defeat (revolutionaries had been defeated before); it was that his devotion and sacrifice went toward building a movement not of labor but of white labor. To find a movement representative of the interests of all members of the working class, it is necessary to look away from white labor radicalism -to the slaves and free persons of color.

The task is to look at a bird and see a snake. The historian faces the problem that while black resistance before the Civil War has been exten-

sively studied, only rarely have the categories of the labor movement been applied to it. As an example of this problem I cite a conversation I recently had with a scholar of what is called Black Studies: I was looking for statistics of fugitive slaves by year, on the chance that they might show a correlation with the fluctuations of the northern economy. The person of whom I was inquiring informed me that the figures did not exist (he is probably right) and that moreover they would show no correlation to the economic cycle, as slaves could not have been aware of economic conditions at their destination. Now I do not know if the figures would reveal any significant fluctuations, but I do know that anyone who thinks slaves could not have been influenced by the availability of jobs in New York City, as Irish and German immigrants were, is revealing his own blindness to the slave as a worker.[10]

Nat Turner's Rebellion of 1831 began a new phase in the struggle against slavery. Since the repression following it made open revolt difficult, the slaves turned toward developing a culture of resistance, which found expression in religion, music, folklore, family ties, sabotage, and flight.[11] The repression also led large numbers of free black people to migrate from the South to the north, where they began to develop new institutions, including the black church, schools, fraternal organizations, newspapers, and especially the Underground Railroad -the most important of all the railroads credited with making an American nation. They also made up the base of abolitionism.

The solidarity of the free Afro-American with the slave was not as obvious as it might seem; it did not, for instance, exist in eighteenth-century Saint Domingue, or in Jamaica before Emancipation, where persons who in the U.S. would have been classified as black made up part of the force that maintained slavery. It was a product of the peculiar American race line, which enlisted the poor whites in policing the slaves and explained the white supremacy of a plebeian radical like Seth Luther. This solidarity leads me to assert, as provocatively as possible, that the black church has historically been more of a proletarian organization than the white labor union.

John Brown's assault on Harper's Ferry on October 16, 1859 opened a new cycle of working-class struggle. The Civil War began with both sides, in the words of Frederick Douglass, fighting for slavery -the South to take it out of the Union, the north to keep it in. At the start of the War, the slaves watched and waited. As the northern armies advanced into the South, they began to leave the plantation, gathering at the Union encampments. At first, they were sent back to their owners. But deny it though the north tried, the War was being fought over slavery, and the slaves knew it better than anyone. The trickle of fugitives became a

flood; before it was over, five hundred thousand workers had fled the plantation. (How much work was being done by those remaining behind is hard to say.) Those who made their way to the northern armies were put to work, their labor now at the service of the invader. Thousands of poor whites, forced by the withdrawal of plantation labor to bear a greater war burden, deserted the Confederate army to return to their fields, or followed the black fugitives into the Union camps. It was a general strike of black and white labor. Barely a year after it began the Confederacy disintegrated.[12]

From the beginning, abolitionists and northern free black people lobbied the government in Washington to abandon the border-state policy and turn the War into a crusade against slavery. The change came about partly in response to the growing refusal of northern white labor to fight the War, of which the Draft Riots were the most dramatic demonstration, and partly in response to the movement of the slaves. If white labor would no longer fight, Lincoln would turn to those who would. Three measures indicated the shift in northern policy: the Emancipation Proclamation, the enlistment of black troops, and the replacement of McClellan by Grant (who, at the battle of Vicksburg, invented modern warfare). To all of these measures the activity of the Negroes proved decisive: as laborers and soldiers they provided the margin of northern victory.[13]

If we began with one worker uprising that is omitted from the history books, we conclude with another: the general strike of plantation labor that went on from 1863 to 1865. Two points, then, will summarize what I have been saying: first, it was not the north that freed the slaves, but the slaves and free Negroes who freed the United States from the domination of the southern system; second, in the period before the Civil War, the class movement of American workers was not expressed in the trade unions, working men's parties, and suffrage and land reform efforts of white labor, but in the striving of the black slave and free person.

NOTES

1 The best account of the riots is Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*. New York, 1990.

2 orig. pub. *Boston Quarterly Review*, printed in Leon Stein and Philip Taft, eds., *Religion, Reform, and Revolution: Labor Panaceas in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, 1969.

3 John R. Commons and associates, *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, vol. 7*. New York, 1958. 356, 361, 362.

4 ibid, 217, 218, 219.

5 Luther spoke of his travels in the South in *Address on the Origins*

of Avarice (Boston, 1834). For information on his life, see Carl Gersuny, "Seth Luther - The Road from Chepachet," *Rhode Island History*, 33 (May 1974) 47-55, Louis Hartz, "Seth Luther: Story of a Working-Class Rebel," *New England Quarterly* vol. 13, no. 3 (Sept. 1940), 401-418, and Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians* (Albany, 1967) passim.

6 *Liberator*, August 26, 1842.

7 *Liberator*, October 29, 1841., Jan. 14, August 7, 1842.

8 A modern history of the Dorr Rebellion is a book of that title by Marvin E. Gettleman (New York, 1973), which presents a brief for the Dorrites. The *Afro-Yankees* by Robert J. Cottrol (Westport, Conn., 1982) manages to provide a more balanced picture in just a few pages.

9 *Negroes and American Democracy*, Detroit, 1956.

10 For a suggestion of a possible channel of information, see Frederick Douglass's account of his time in the Baltimore shipyard, working alongside and talking with white workers, while still in contact with the plantation.

11 The best discussion of slave resistance is George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, Westport, Conn., 1972.

12 W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York, 1935) was the first to label the flight from the plantation a general strike. He noted explicitly (page 64) that it was a strike of black and white labor.

13 The Emancipation Proclamation declared slavery abolished in those areas of the country in rebel hands, that is, where Union authority did not reach. Hence it freed literally not a single person; but it was important as a declaration of purpose, and it encouraged the flight of black labor from the plantation. See Joseph T. Glaathaar, "Black Glory: The African-American Role in Union Victory," in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York, 1992), 133-162.

Editorial: When does the unreasonable act make sense?

Two points define the position of *Race Traitor*: first, that the "white race" is not a natural but a historical category; second, that what was historically constructed can be undone. The first of these points is now widely accepted; scientists have concluded that there are no biological standards for distinguishing one "race" from another, and social scientists have begun to examine how race was constructed and how it is reproduced. However, few scholars or activists have taken the next step: indeed, one might say that up to now the philosophers have merely interpreted the white race; the point, however, is to abolish it. How can this be done?

The white race is like a private club, which grants privileges to certain people in return for obedience to its rules. It is based on one huge assumption: that all those who look white are, whatever their complaints or reservations, fundamentally loyal to it.

What happened to Rodney King was not exceptional. All over the world, cops beat poor people; that is their job. What is unusual is that they do not routinely beat some people for whom every mark save one--their color--would indicate a beating. For those in power, the privileges granted to whites are a small price to pay for the stability of an unjust social system.

What if the white skin lost its usefulness as a badge of loyalty? What if the cop, the judge, the social worker, the schoolteacher, and the other representatives of official society could no longer recognize a loyal person merely by looking, how would it affect their behavior? And if color no longer served as a handy guide to the dispensing of favors, so that ordinary whites began experiencing the sort of treatment to which they are normally immune, how would this affect their outlook?

Elsewhere in this issue it is pointed out that the rules of the white club do not require that all members be strong advocates of white supremacy, merely that they defer to the prejudices of others. The need to maintain racial solidarity imposes a stifling conformity on whites, on any subject touching even remotely on race.

The way to abolish the white race is to disrupt that conformity. If enough people who look white violate the rules of whiteness, so flagrantly that they jeopardize their white standing, their existence cannot be ignored. If it becomes impossible for the upholders of white rules to speak in the name of all who look white, the white race will cease to exist.

We recognize that this advice flies in the face of what is usually regarded as sound, practical sense. Even (we might say especially) in the ranks of the reformers the conventional wisdom teaches that the way to achieve social change is to strive to express the desires of an existing constituency. That is perhaps why most social reform is so useless.

We are calling for the opposite: a minority willing to undertake outrageous acts of provocation, aware that they will incur the opposition of many who might agree with them if they adopted a more moderate approach.

How many will it take? No one can say for sure. It is a bit like the problem of currency: how much counterfeit money has to circulate in order to destroy the value of the official currency? The answer is, nowhere near a majority--just enough to undermine public confidence in the official stuff. When it comes to abolishing the white race, the task is not to win over more whites to oppose "racism"; there are "anti-racists" enough already to do the job.

In a previous issue we wrote, "In a certain sense, the entire project of *Race Traitor* is to examine, from every possible angle, the moment when Huck Finn, and all the modern Huck Finns, decide to break with what Huck calls 'sivilization' and take the steps that will lead to Jim's, and their own, freedom." Since we are talking about acts which are, by definition, unreasonable (because they fly in the face of all contemporary reasonable opinion), we could reformulate as follows the central problem *Race Traitor* seeks to address: When does the unreasonable act make sense?

In our pages we have published accounts from the past and present, where so-called whites have committed acts which defy reason but which turn out to have been socially effective. There are others we know of but have not written about, and still others we do not know of but want to report. We believe that to popularize such examples will contribute to altering current notions of what constitutes reason, and will encourage others to be still bolder.

Finally, we know how devilishly difficult it is for individuals to escape whiteness. The white race does not voluntarily surrender a single member, so that even those who step outside of it in one situation find it virtually impossible not to step back in later, if for no other reason than

the assumptions of others. But we also know that when there comes into being a critical mass of people who, though they look white, have ceased to act white, the white race will explode, and former whites will be able to take part, together with others, in building a new human community.

ANTI-FASCISM, "ANTI-RACISM," AND ABOLITION

There now exist in this country and around the world a number of organizing projects, research centers, and publications that call themselves "anti-racist." Among those that have come to our attention are the *Monitor*, published by the Center for Democratic Renewal, PO Box 50469, Atlanta, GA 30302-0469; *The Racemixer*, published by Communities Against Hate, 485 Blair Boulevard, Eugene, OR 97402; and *Turning the Tide*, published by People Against Racist Terror, PO Box 1990, Burbank, CA 91507. These publications all provide useful coverage and we recommend them to our readers.

The three publications cited above are obviously produced by people who understand that the denial of equality to people of color is but one among a number of things wrong with this society, and that others include the oppression of women, the persecution of those who enjoy sex with people of their own sex, hatred of Jews and the foreign-born, neglect of the aged and the infirm, poverty and homelessness, disdain for the natural environment, and so forth. The "anti-racist" movement by and large is sympathetic to all efforts to correct these wrongs, and one of the publications we named, *Turning the Tide*, states repeatedly its commitment to transformimg the entire society.

Yet almost all the attention of the "anti-racist" movement is focused on groups like the nazis and the klan that explicitly avow their racism, and on various movements like anti-abortion and anti-gay rights that are largely led by people on the far right of the political spectrum, and its programatic initiatives are directed almost exclusively at combating these forces.

This is a mistake. Just as the capitalist system is not a capitalist plot, *race is not the work of racists*. On the contrary, it is reproduced by the principal institutions of society, among which are the schools (which define "excellence"), the labor market (which defines "employment"), the law (which defines "crime"), the welfare system (which defines "poverty"), and the family (which defines "kinship")--and *it is rein-*

forced by various reform programs which address many of the social problems traditionally of concern to the left. For example, we recently heard an excellent talk documenting how federal programs aimed at expanding working-class home ownership actually increased the gap between white and black housing--through the normal operation of the credit system, "sound" mortgage approval policies, etc.

Racist and far-right groups in the main represent caricatures of reality in this race-defined society; at most they are efforts by a few to push the race line farther than what is currently considered proper. If that is the case, the "anti-racist" movement is seriously misreading the roots of the race problem, and pursuing an erroneous strategy for addressing it.

Race Traitor believes that the main target of those who seek to eradicate the color line should be the institutions and behaviors that maintain it: the schools, the criminal justice and welfare systems, the employers and unions, and the family. In this we stand with the original Abolitionists, who never tired of pointing out that the problem was not the slaveholders of Carolina, but the loyal citizens of Massachusetts.

The December issue of the anarchist paper *Love and Rage* carries several comments on a recent attempt to stop a group of self-proclaimed nazis from holding a "Gay-bashing" fest in New Hope, Pennsylvania. The entire story is too long to recount here (we advise readers to obtain a copy of this excellent publication by sending $1 to PO Box 853, Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009), but, briefly, what happened is this: on learning that the nazis planned to march and rally, a group of their opponents called a counter-rally. The nazis, fearful for their safety, called off their march, but proceeded with the rally, which took place as scheduled behind a wall of police, who protected them from the hostile crowd. The report states, "Residents of New Hope and anti-fascist organizers alike claimed the cancellation of the march as a victory for anti-fascist organizers. By creating the possibility of hundreds or thousands of counter-protestors willing to physically confront the nazis, we made it impossible for them to march. This stategy, of organizing for the possibility of physical confrontation, and bringing hundreds of people willing to carry it out, is clearly a successful one and needs to be pursued in the future."

We are not so sure. That the cancellation of the march was a defeat for the nazis we have no doubt; but it seems to us that it was more of a victory for the state than for the anti-fascist organizers, because the state was able to emerge as the defender of both free speech and law-and-order, marginalizing the "extremists" on both sides--those who want to build death camps and those who want to prevent their construction. We are inclined to agree with another commentator who called the

counter-demonstration "ineffective."

We favor beating nazis off the streets wherever they appear; and confronting "racists" or other reactionaries of the right (or the left). But we ask, what is the purpose of this "strategy"? If it is to do material damage to the fascists, then it takes no genius to point out that such damage can be done them more effectively on virtually any day of the year other than when they appear in public surrounded by an army of cops and television cameras. If it is to win people out of the nazi ranks, we have no way of knowing how effective such actions are. If the aim is to expose the state as the defender of nazis, that is only a very partial truth; the state is the defender of public order, and has shown itself quite willing to repress nazis and other white supremacist groups who threaten that order. And if the purpose is to win people to a vision of a world without race barriers, then we must say that any action which aims to crush the nazis physically and fails to do so because of state intervention has the effect of reinforcing the authority of the state, which, as we said, is the most important agency maintaining race barriers.

NOTE:

The editors publish things in *Race Traitor* because they think that publishing them will help build a community of readers. Their own opinions are expressed in editorials and unsigned replies to letters.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE ONLY RACE

To the Editors:

I've now seen two issues of *Race Traitor*. The implication of almost every article I've looked at is that when whites break with white supremacy they become "black." In my view, when anyone breaks with a biological or cultural identity with a race, they become *human*. The "only race is the rat race," as the black and white rioters in London in 1981 said, and beyond the rat race, the human race.

I oppose the current mood of bashing "dead white European males" and the more general mood that sees a decisive characteristic of the modern capitalist world as "white." As far as I'm concerned, it is no more important that Durer, Milton, Blake, or Beethoven were "white" than it was that Confucius was "yellow" or that Avicenna was whatever color he was (and we hardly know, so little does it matter to the Moslems and non-Moslems of every color who venerate him). All of these people were expressions of certain moments of world historical development, and it is those moments which are interesting, not the retroactive projection of the 19th-century category of "race" that has little or no meaning in most world civilizations.

I will be more sympathetic to *Race Traitor* when it starts publishing articles that reflect the spirit of Miles Davis, not known for sycophancy toward whites, in his *Autobiography* (p. 61):

> Another thing I found strange after living and playing in New York was that a lot of black musicians didn't know anything about music theory . . . A lot of the old guys thought that if you went to school it would make you play like you were white. Or, if you learned something from theory, you would lose the feeling in your playing. I couldn't believe that all them guys like Bird, Prez, Bean, all them cats wouldn't go to museums or libraries and borrow those musical scores by all those great composers, like Stravinsky, Alban Berg, Prokofiev. *I wanted to see what was going on in all of music. Knowledge is freedom and ignorance is slavery, and I just couldn't believe someone could be that close to freedom and not take advantage of it. I have never understood why black people didn't take advantage of all the shit they can. It's like a ghetto mentality telling people they aren't supposed to do certain things, that those things are only*

reserved for white people . . . (my emphasis)

You think *Race Traitor* is "against the grain" of the present, yet in fact it at best sidesteps a confrontation with one of the most powerful trends of the present, everywhere in the world, that of tribalization. In that sense you are not so different from the deconstructionists. You just don't like the biggest tribe, which currently dominates in most of the Western world (minus Japan). But you're not interested in a general critique of the tribal, or "ghetto mentality" as Davis calls it, which is a key part of overthrowing the status quo, and not recomposing it. You like whites breaking from white supremacy, but you don't like (or talk about) blacks like Miles Davis breaking from the "ghetto mentality" described above, or Malcolm's discovery of a world through the dictionary in prison, and his break with the ghetto mentality of the Muslims. The things they break "to," like Stravinsky, Berg, etc. are today derided in certain circles as "white," and you have nothing to say about that.

What is the real difference between your notion of "whiteness" and the postmodernists' "dead white European males?" What about the question of universality, the "what was going on in all of . . . (fill in the blank)" in the Miles Davis quote? You focus on the Atlantic litoral and therefore obscure the fact that the tribalization going on there, often expressed in white supremacy and "identity politics" revolting against it, is part of the larger anti-universalist movement everywhere. And what about all the oppressed people trapped by the ideologues of their "ghetto mentality?" What race do they get to betray?

The chickens are coming home to roost on the question of anti-universalism. At the recent Human Rights spectacle in Vienna, speakers from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere denounced the "Western" concept of human rights, not for its hypocrisy and double standard, no!, but by saying that Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, etc. had "different" traditions of human rights, and who was to say that beheading adulterous women in public or cutting off the hands of thieves was barbaric, when it was custom, tradition? Third World deconstructionists have found themselves out of sorts when confronted by Third World women pointing out that postmodernism has robbed them of the very universal standards they need to fight their local "ghetto mentality."

Loren Goldner
Cambridge, Mass.
July 28, 1993

Editors' reply. In answer to your question about the difference between

us and the postmodernists, we believe that race is not a biological but a social fact, constructed through history. The white race consists of those people who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Accordingly, it makes no sense to apply to Durer, Milton, Blake, or Beethoven a label, "white," that had no meaning for them. But make no mistake about it: we intend to keep bashing the dead white males, and the live ones, and the females, too, until the social construct known as "race" is destroyed--not "deconstructed" but destroyed.

As we wrote editorially in our first issue and repeated on several occasions, race has no existence apart from social distinctions. We agree, therefore, that when whites reject their racial identity, they take a big step toward becoming human. But may that step not entail, for many, some engagement with blackness, perhaps even an identification as "black"? Recent experience, in this country and elsewhere, would indicate that it does. Apparently, you are put off by that step. We are not.

In our view the most dangerous ghetto mentality on the planet is the one that leads people to cling to their whiteness. Given the particular task *Race Traitor* has set for itself, we do not see much point in campaigning against political or cultural narrowness among black people; in fact, we think that, in the absence of a general and sustained struggle on the part of so-called whites against their own racial prerogatives, a "general critique of the tribal mentality" would reinforce the white identity we are seeking to undermine. The white and black races do not perform symmetrical functions in this country, and we do not take a symmetrical approach toward dissolving them.

We hope we have gained your sympathy by publishing the excerpt from Miles Davis's *Autobiography*. We hasten to point out, however, that we publish it not to warn black people against cultural and political narrowness, but to raise once again the question: why do such admirable expressions of universality emanate with disproportionate frequency from black rather than white people?

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE GRACIOUS, THE MERCIFUL

To the Editor:

I was so impressed by your journal that no words can explain it. To reach the understanding you have reached must have been difficult. But more difficult still is the stand you have taken to do something about it.

As a displaced African (seems more appropriate than the term "African-American") it brings tears to my eyes to know that there are whites whose desire to live as human beings is more intense than their desire to worship themselves.

As an Ahmadi Muslim, it brings tears to my eyes to know that there is a group of "white"-Americans who are so close to being Muslims in the sense of desiring to worship NO HUMAN BEING that it makes me wonder how long you all will be able to continue publishing without big time opposition from those in the power-elite who might happen to run across your journal. I must commit myself to remember to pray that Allah protect you and guide you.

Please allow me a few words regarding an important concept (the more correct phrase is "important reality") which I believe your readers will appreciate and which, I hope, will be useful to them. Unfortunately this reality has been so distorted and obscured by religious myth-makers--especially by Christians of the fundamentalist persuasion--that its potency and potential usefulness as a practical tool of human liberation has been totally ignored by many of those who wish to be involved in the creation of a new "human community-in-formation," to quote *Race Traitor* editor, Noel Ignatiev.

It concerns the idea of the globalization of tyranny and the fundamental causes of that tyranny; an idea, or revelation, understood throughout millennia by people of various religions.

This reality is called The Endtyrant in Judaism, the Dajaal in Islam, and The AntiChrist in Christianity. These three traditions (as well as others, including the Hindu tradition of the Kali Yuga and the Teutonic tradition of the Ragnorok) deal with the culminating, catastrophic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. I will explain shortly the connection of this reality to racism and racialism.

After almost two-thousand years of Christian scriptural interpretation and general literary speculation regarding the advent of a latter-day or "Apocalyptic" solitary human being known as "The AntiChrist," this figure has yet to emerge. This is because of the fact that there is nothing literal about the signs of this figure (which have been mentioned in various religious traditions), other than that it would cause mass havoc through deception.

In Arabic, the word Dajaal is derived from dajala, which means "he covered". A few of the beliefs concerning the nature of the Dajaal, and which can be found in Arabic Lexicons, are 1) the Dajaal is a liar and covers or conceals truth with falsehood; 2) the Dajaal will cover people with unbelief, 3) the Dajaal will spread over and cover the entire earth.

Before further explanation, it is important to understand something: the Dajaal, or AntiChrist, or Endtyrant is not "coming" or "on the way." The Dajaal is here. And it is not a person, as depicted in the Omen movies [although those movies give some rather strong hints regarding the phenomenon of The AntiChrist, particularly regarding the control of

food--one of the ancient signs revealed to prophets such as Prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace]. And it has spread all over the earth. And what is this Dajaal which has spread? Simply this: Deceptive ideas; ideas such as "race" and "nation"; ideas such as "land ownership" rather than land trust; ideas such as "limitlessness" rather than conservation; ideas rooted in the "principles" of Social Darwinism rather than the moral imperatives of sharing and caring; ideas which have also become institutionalized.

I want the reader to know that the true and demythicized revelation regarding The AntiChrist has to do with ideas, and was first exposed in the year 1893 by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, an Islamic prophet, mystic, sufi and reformer:

> As to the Anti-Christ, now listen, and I will explain to you the reality on the basis of the clear and true revelation that I have received. Then understand, my dear ones, that it has been disclosed to me that the reference to the Dajaal [Anti-Christ] as one individual is not designed to indicate his personal individuality but his unity as a class meaning thereby that in that class there will be a unity of ideas as is indeed indicated by the word Dajaal itself and in this name there are many signs for those who reflect. The meaning of the word Dajaal is a chain of deceptive ideas, the links of which are so attached to each other as if it was a structure of equal sized bricks of the same color, quality and strength, some of them firmly overlapping others and further strengthened by being plastered from outside. (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Ayena Kamalat-i-Islam, Qadian, 1893.)

For those who are not comfortable with religion or religious teachers, I need only point you to a passage from a book written by a popular, modern author which seems to strongly corroborate Ahmad's revelation of 100 years ago:

> Today we are so indoctrinated in the modern world view that we seldom, if ever, pause to ponder the impact it has had on our personal and institutional relationships and our attitudes toward nature...
>
> Analytical and rational modes of thinking, mechanistic views of nature, reducing phenomena to purely quantifiable standards of measurement, the neutrality of science, knowledge as power, self-interest as the motivating force in history, the invisible hand of the market-place, and utilitarianism are among

> the critical intellectual assumptions that, together, provide a unified intellectual schema for the modern notion of an autonomous, secular existence. (*Biosphere Politics*, page 36, by Jeremy Rifkin, New York 1991)

It should be understood that "Whiteness" is only one link in that chain of deceptive ideas imposed upon us by The AntiChrist, there being many others. *Race Traitor*'s attack on that one link is important. I offer below some reasons why the various links in the chain of deceptive ideas developed. For the process of exposing the deceptive ideas which plague our times, the following may also be used as guideposts:

1.The non-recognition or "dethroning" of the Eternal Being (Allah, God, Jehovah, Yahweh), particularly the force of that being within ourselves;
2.The installation of man as God, in the sense of man being the center of the universe;
3.The strict externalization of religion and spirituality;
4.The destruction of the concept of time and, therefore,
5.The disconnection of human beings from the rhythms and periodicities of nature;
6.The removal of limits;
7.The corrupt application of the concept of "individualism," or its extension in the form of "nationalism."

Once it is fully understood that the AntiChrist is here, it will no longer be necessary for Muslims to wait for the big one-eyed monster called the Dajaal (the 1,400 year old prophecy of the "one-eyed" was alluding to a strict concentration on materialism); it will no longer be necessary for Christians to wait for some individual to emerge out of Europe to "deceive" the world. Because the monster is here and the deception has taken place, Christian propaganda notwithstanding.

Certainly throughout human history, war, hardship and pain have existed. But a distinguishing feature of The Antichrist mentioned in various religious traditions is that, for the first time in human history, these bitter aspects of human history would be: 1) spread globally; 2) magnified through the common acceptance of "deceptive ideas"; and 3) consummated in the horrible specter of global catastrophe.

The Dajaal could not have appeared before modern times, because it is only in modern times that the extension of ideas (for example, through satellite communication) and the extension of the power to enforce those ideas (for example, through intercontinental ballistic missiles) became

possible on a global scale.

The real job is to reject the Dajaal's "chain of deceptive ideas" and work hard to create a heaven on earth for ourselves and our descendants. It is this job which the movement Hazrat Ahmad left behind--The Ahmadiyya Movement In Islam--has been dedicated to for the past 104 years.

In the 1893 revealed definition of The AntiChrist which I reproduced above lie the seeds of a new understanding. And the current testament to the truth and power of this definition by many modern authors, shows that spiritual understanding can and should be an important part of the building of a new world community.

Among "white" radical intellectuals, the need to combine spiritual as well as intellectual striving is dire. This need is required in order for white radical intellectuals to inculcate within their very beings the humility needed to truly move beyond the constraints of their own limited and often tainted experiences, and to unbind the shackles of intellectual arrogance which almost always impede their growth as total human beings on all four planes: physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual.

White radical intellectuals should include within their studies, treasures located in the religious books and in the sayings of the saints and holy ones, such as Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Revolutions which have their spiritual and intellectual foundations rooted in eternal truths, cannot be snuffed out as can those revolutions whose foundations are rooted strictly in human thought and reaction. The latter type of revolution can always be snuffed out. But the former type is like a slow-growing, California redwood: strong, permanent and unshakable.

May Allah Himself bless your efforts which are definitely grounded in a sense of true humanity and piety.

Sincerely,

Abubakr Ben Ishmael Salahuddin
Evanston, Illinois
September 28, 1993

P.S.Readers wishing to obtain literature from The Ahmadiyya Movement In Islam may write to:

M.M. Ahmad
Amir
Ahmadiyya Movement In Islam
2141 Leroy Place N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008-1890

Rashid Yahya
Muballigh
Ahmadiyya Movement In Islam
2 South 510 Rte 53
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-7176 (Chicago area)

Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad
Khalifatul Masih IV
Ahmadiyya Movement In Islam
The London Mosque
16 Gressenhall Road
London, SW18 5QL
United Kingdom

DOUBLE TAKE

To the Editor:

I recently saw a copy of *Race Traitor* that a friend had lying on her dining room table. At first I did a double take, thinking she had come across some Klan or neo-Nazi material to peruse. Imagine my pleasure at what I did find.

One of the dangers of the whole debate on the construction of identity concerns the easy slipping into a denial of whiteness.... "There really is no such thing as race, it's all socially constructed, so I am just a concerned person, committed to working to eradicate the entire idea of race." Yes, race is constructed and yes, race has real and lived consequences. Rewriting theory and exposing social belief does not directly affect the experience of oppression.

I like the humor in the title, "Race Traitor"--the using of an often angrily flung "insult" as a source of empowerment. I also like the radicalism... white anti-racism often seems to come from a place of compromise, of working within whiteness to access experiences of color... not working within whiteness to expose whiteness. The idea of a "race traitor" maintains a focus on whiteness without the implied black-people-as-victim rhetoric sometimes involved in anti-racist work done by white folks.

Some of the work that interests me is around class. I was raised poor to working in a predominantly black inner-city neighborhood of Cleveland. Everyone was poor everyone was fucked over by changing government policy and the only power my family had and took was their whiteness. This "power" maintained my family's oppression even as they saw it raising them beyond the lowest social class. My interest is in

how race rhetoric maintains both division within the working class and maintains a working class. This leads into so many avenues... of course.

Susan Raffo
Minneapolis
August 3, 1993

RESPONSE TO "CROSSOVER DREAMS"

To the Editor:

The following thoughts constitute a response to Phil Rubio's essay "Crossover Dreams: The 'Exceptional White' in Popular Culture," published in the second issue of *Race Traitor*. Rubio discusses the phenomenon of the "exceptional white" as he surveys the roles some of these public figures have played in jazz, popular music, films, and sports. An analysis of the cultural space occupied by those categorized as "exceptional whites" would necessarily speak to the heart of the project undertaken by the editors of *Race Traitor*--the abolition of the socially constructed white race. The phenomenon of the "exceptional white" raises questions about the lack of cultural democracy within the United States as well as more fundamental issues regarding the sources of the profound anxiety--and downright dishonesty--that surround the nation's popular cultural identity/identities. Furthermore, a close look at the culture industry and the politics of cultural reception in the United States can reveal how the racist aspects of the nation's political and economic practices are often reinscribed in cultural productions, especially when propagated through mass media.

Unfortunately, Rubio does not examine these questions adequately. Not even bothering to define the term "exceptional white," Rubio fails to theorize his subject, or even to lend a critical eye or ear to the examples, which causes his essay to meander, never quite advancing an argument one way or the other about the import of the so-called "exceptional white." There is no consideration given to the economic implications of the phenomenon he discusses. Equally glaring is the absence of any cultural critique of any of the productions; there is no attempt made to evaluate the aesthetic success or artistic relevance of the various artists and entertainers. What results is a romanticization as "race traitors" of whites who cross over in the public sphere of entertainment or in the physical space of black neighborhoods.

While Rubio never explicitly defines "exceptional white," the epigraphs by Jack Kerouac and Dan Ackroyd as Elwood Blues (of the Blue Brothers) as well as his opening sentences--"Can a white boy (or

girl) play the blues? And why have so many wanted to for so long?"--indicate that by this term he means a white who successfully (at least according to popular reception) incorporates black art forms or utilizes African American techniques in their cultural productions. Rubio does clarify his meaning by revealing that as an aspiring musician he harbored his own crossover dreams, choosing for mentors white musicians that didn't "play white," especially those who had served apprenticeships with accomplished black musicians. Having admitted this, he does ask a pertinent question:

> How can a racist society also make it the supreme compliment for a white musician to be told by an African-American audience that he or she "sounds black?" Is this the beginning of a dramatic shift in cultural attitudes among European-Americans, or just newer minstrelsy, through which whites can steal from, put down, and envy black culture all at the same time?... Finally, if what we are witnessing is white assimilation, how will it go from cultural to political, or is it in fact already there?

These questions are never really addressed. The tentative conclusion he reaches is that the contemporary scene witnesses a new movement wherein black and white youth are mixing cultures. At every juncture of U.S. cultural history African Americans have contributed to the national mix and thus black and white Americans naturally share certain outlooks and ways of doing things. It is equally true, however, that at no time in our history have blacks been seen as the intellectual and cultural equals of whites. The well-known particulars of the minstrel tradition demonstrate how ambiguous the flattery of imitation can be. Often what results is that blacks are imitated and reviled at the same time. We have seen this not just in the late-nineteenth-century coon songs but in all the defining moments of white crossover in music. So, for instance, when New Yorkers made the journey uptown during the twenties to hear black big bands or during the forties to check out the new black music called bebop, American music was forever changed, but the status of black musicians remained the same. The greatest American musician of the post-World-War-II era, Charles Parker, dies penniless and all but unknown except by a coterie who all but worshipped him. The musical language that he and others created has become part of the everyday musical language of the nation, and has spawned countless other breakthroughs. There is not a single established jazz musician who does not borrow heavily from Parker's lexicon, and several musicians have built

careers plagiarizing his work. Still, hardly anyone knows or cares about Bird. Were Parker white, this would be unimaginable. A distinction must be made between the type of respect that is implicit in the mixing of cultures and the type of respect that is implicit in cultural democracy. In other words, the new crossover trends (like old ones) can represent a mixing of youth cultures across racial lines without erasing the more odious aspects of the color line.

Although Albert Murray's *Omni-Americans* is cited more than once, and a footnote tells us that Dizzy Gillespie noted how whites and blacks in Cuba and Brazil share Africanized cultures, Rubio seems unwilling to factor into his account that our corner of America enjoys an Africanized popular culture as well. Without acknowledging what Murray calls the "mulattoization" of U.S. culture any attempt to critique contemporary crossover is doomed. Of course the sources of U.S. culture is a very difficult knot to unravel. In addition to the forms and techniques that are shared, there are strains that are more or less specific to cultural subgroups. This is especially the case in popular music.

The most significant American music form of the twentieth century is the blues. Upon it are built all of the national musics of this century, including pop music (from Tin Pan Alley to MTV), gospel, R&B, jazz, country and western, rock n' roll, and others. Nor is its prevalence limited to its parent country; the blues has become the dominant international form of popular and dance music. Its rhythms and inflections can be heard in virtually every place that has electricity.

Even the most obtuse cultural critics will not deny that the blues is of African American origin. Slightly more controversial is the often cited claim that the most significant developments (in terms of innovation and influence) in blues-derived musics have been brought about through the creative breakthroughs of African Americans. As with anything there are exceptions, but this axiom holds even in forms associated with whites--e.g., Where would hard rock be without the guitar/musical revolution of Jimi Hendrix? The denial of African American influence in the national character and culture has had a devastating effect on the economic survival of many black artists. The problem is not simply that the official historiography of American culture is inaccurate due to its attempt to cover up the seminal role played by blacks, but that black artists suffer through diminished access to and control of the means of cultural production. The United Statesian cultural landscape relegates black artists to the role of cheaply bought talent to be packaged and "developed" according to the dictates of mostly white businessmen whose interests are seldom artistic but unabashedly commercial. In an industry where originality is the stuff of commerce, appropriation without effective acknowledgement is tanta-

mount to rip-off. It is because of this that we must refrain from a naive valorization of white crossover artists.

Rubio may be comfortable with what he calls white assimilation, but American popular culture has been a cross-cultural affair for centuries. America's understanding of its culture is impoverished to the degree that it turns a blind eye to this central fact. But contrary to the ideas put forth in "Crossover Dreams," I do not believe that mere acknowledgement of the African and African American sources of cultural approaches absolves our society of its moral obligations in this matter. Even when black influences are obvious and acknowledges, the cold fact is that many cultural superstars enjoy their status not because of superior artistry, but primarily because of sufficient mastery of African American techniques and their "whiteness." What difference does it make to an overlooked artist with proven artistic originality and cultural relevance if his or her unauthorized protege is valorized and employed to his or her exclusion simply because of racial considerations? Rubio asks where we should draw the line between respect and rip-off. Just as two points define a line in geometry, this line of respect to black artists is not defined with the single point of acknowledgement. To acknowledgement must be added economic and cultural democracy.

Salim Washington
Roxbury, Mass.
November 1, 1993

Phil Rubio replies. Salim Washington's points are well-taken. I focused on the impulse among whites to cross over, or assimilate, in rejecting a culture that normally steals from and also demonizes black culture. I did point out that U.S. culture is "Africanized," which "white culture" tries to deny. And I described "exceptional whites" as those who see themselves (or are seen) as different (i.e., not racist), not merely those who have "mastered the techniques" of black culture.

As I wrote in my essay, the white artists I mentioned were "not models... so much as examples"; after all, cultural figures (and their art) reflect rather than dictate popular aspirations. I don't romanticize them, and agree with Washington that acknowledgement isn't enough, although I'm aware that it's an important issue in the African-American community. For example, in accepting his Grammy award for the song "When a Man Loves a Woman" and "forgetting" to thank Percy Sledge for his original version, Michael Bolton made his name (like Dan Emmett's) a synonym for "rip-off." By contrast, Bonnie Raitt's artistic sincerity, gratitude, and promotion of African-American musicians is probably why she has been (to my knowledge) the only white guest host

of the "Saturday Night at the Apollo" TV show.

Last year Oprah Winfrey devoted a show to the "wigger" phenomenon. Young white kids in hip-hop clothes with their liberal parents were stunned when black audience members challenged them. "This is nothing but a fad," said one woman. "Exploiting our culture," said another. But a white writer for *The Source* was applauded when he said, "My problem is... there are not more wiggers... that they don't learn from black people."

That's similar to how I ended my essay: "But when will the 'exceptional white' become the rule" (socially as well as culturally)? While not new, the phenomenon emerges more strongly with each succeeding generation of young whites, only to retreat before reaction. I see my job as encouraging the emergence, because we will never have true democracy so long as we have a "white community." For that reason I'm uncomfortable with anything less than wholesale (and conscious) "white assimilation."

LA CIVIL WAR

To the Editor:

I think *Race Traitor* is an excellent publication. I especially liked the Chicago Surrealist Group's analysis of the Civil War that took place in Los Angeles during April/May of 1992. The Surrealists seem unafraid to align themselves with the black masses, and as a black male I appreciate that very much.

Burnham Ware
Owenton, Kentucky
December 1, 1993

RUCHELL MAGEE CASE

To the Editor:

I read your most remarkable and understanding article, "Manifesto of the New Abolitionism," which appeared in the Nov.-Dec. issue of *Turning the Tide* along with the rundown on my case.

During the August 7, 1970 slave rebellion in Marin Court, prison officials shot up the room which contained nine persons with myself. By use of excessive force, prison officials killed four persons (including a superior court judge).

During the trial, the District Attorney, Gary Thomas, who was paralyzed from the waist down, testified falsely about grabbing a gun and shooting Magee, Jackson, Chritmas, and the Judge. The jurors wrote, "Gary

Thomas testimony consisted of too many inconsistencies for acceptance..."

My testimony was similar to the defense of Joseph Cinque who rebelled against slavery a century before your age. I presented evidence of the Los Angeles County frame-up by the Club "which enrolls certain people at birth, without their consent, and brings them up according to its rules...." The cover-up of the Club's slavery operation depends on the willingness of judges appointed by politicians to "place their racial interests above" the people's constitutional law to obstruct the right of the victims of racism to be heard. These facts proven publicly will organize millions to support the Ruchell Cinque's Future Bill on the right of the public to elect judges, which will abolish politician's appointment of judges.

The key to solving the Habeas Corpus issues is to order the state Attorney General to file a written return addressing the merits. By merely producing the record of my trial, the State will clarify acquittal. What somebody outside of the Club can do in five minutes to correct a problem, those loyal to the Club of Racism cannot address in a million years, if given that long.

On April 3, 1973, Judge Morton Colvin (Gov. Reagan appointee) ordered a mistrial without recording the [jury's] acquittal. Before mistrial [was declared], several jurors told Judge Colvin by note what their verdicts were: hung on the lesser included offense (simple kidnap), after eliminating the greater charge (Kidnap P.C. 209). Judge Colvin failed to give the Allen Charge, which required polling of the jury. Why? The Club of Racism see Ruchell Magee as a "Black Symbol of Rebellion." On April 27, 1973, the jurors filed a declaration of acquittal before Judge Colvin in protest at his failure to record their acquittal verdicts. With the news media and the courts, a show was put on, resulting in a life sentence.

Still standing up against government corruption (bribery to conceal evidence), I ask the federal court to decide whether the whites had the legal authority to bring the charge at all after the jurors reached the "not guilty" verdict. The writ of Habeas Corpus in question:In Re Ruchell Cinque Magee, #C-93-1047-FMS and #C-93-1048-FMS, presently before the United States District Court, Northern District at San Francisco, California.

As a voice for my defense, you may: (1) write or telephone Dr. Mary F. Barry at Howard University and ask that she join the congregation to confirm the acquittal, and (2) help set up a TV talk show to ask the California Attorney General to confirm the validity of the jurors' declaration of acquittal.

Ruchell Cinque Magee
Box 7500, 2C.223, A92051
Cresecent City, California 95531
November 28, 1993

HABIT OF RESISTANCE

To the Editor:

I've just finished reading most of the contributions to the Summer '93 *Race Traitor* (which I welcomed after your premiere issue). I particularly liked "Crossover Dreams" and John Garvey's, "Problem with Multicultural Education." I was intrigued by the content and felt validated by some of the examples of "defection" from the "white race." The use of the word "Traitor" in the journal title, while provocative, is accurate. When we, who are seen as white, are unwilling "to place [our] racial interests above class, gender, or any other interests" we hold, there truly will be tremors leading to the defeat of racism.

I have passed copies of the last issue on to four other white workers in various parts of the country and encouraged them to use it in their organizing work. I urge other readers to do the same.

I also share some thoughts expressed well by North Carolina folksinger Si Kahn, who works with a group called Grassroots Leadership. He talks of a "habit of resistance," defining it as "a deep and abiding clarity about right and wrong, about good and evil, and (I would say of even greater importance) a reflexive ability to take direct and immediate action when confronted with injustice or to refuse to act when confronted with an unjust choice."

It's not enough to see things as they really are and be indignant. It's up to those of us who have any degree of power and access in this society to make sure our power and access are used to open doors and not to close them to those who are less privileged than we are. "It's up to all of us to teach... each generation the habits of resistance" so that we are always sure of how and when to act justly and quickly even in the face of fear.

Don Cavellini
Greenville, North Carolina
September 24, 1993

ANARCHIST RACE TRAITORS

To the Editors:

Race Traitor has had quite an impact on the anarchist scene up here. Almost all the copies have sold and many people are struggling with the concept. We used the race traitor concept in an anti-Klan leaflet that was distributed by an anarchist contingent that went to a counter-demo in

Columbus, Ohio. A new anarchist collecive made up mainly of ex-members of the Profane Existence collective has discussed *Race Traitor* and race traitorism for their new political statement.

Kieran Frazier
Minneapolis, Minnesota
November 15, 1993

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